

Attractive Oblivions: Identity, Queer Theory, and Heterotopias in Ari Aster's

Midsommar and Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last*

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ABSTRACT

In 1966, French philosopher Michel Foucault outlined the notions of “heterotopias” in a talk given to a group of architects, titled “Of Other Spaces: Of Utopias and Heterotopias,” exploring the principles that constitute these very “other” places and their relationship to the spaces that define them. Foucault’s theory was largely abandoned and left unfinished, though completed enough to puzzle scholars with its contradictions and incompatibilities. This project explores practical applications of Foucault’s theory on heterotopias, allowing for a flexible interpretation with the deployment of queer theory. Though Foucault’s theory on heterotopias largely explores space, this project attempts a new interpretation of the theory that examines queered identities and their relationship to space, arguing that it is queered identities that queer a space and characterize it as heterotopic. Exploring Ari Aster’s 2019 film *Midsommar* and Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last*, the project uses the two texts as case studies for the application and expansion of Foucault’s theory on heterotopias.

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INTRODUCTION

The theory of heterotopias was introduced by Michel Foucault in “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias” concerning the use of space in society. Throughout this brief lecture given by the Foucault in 1967, he describes heterotopias as spaces both existing and not-existing within our societies – spaces that are “othered” and contradict social norms. While Foucault outlined the specifics of heterotopias on three separate occasions, the most known was given to a group of architects that was played over radio and recorded by a stenographer and was not published until twenty years after its original broadcast. Because of this, Foucault had mostly forgotten about the theory and it’s still left unfinished with many contradictions – leaving it open to heavy criticism, and yet, also giving people who work with the theory some openness in terms of how it can be productively and interestingly applied.

Though Foucault delivers this speech in 1967, the previous year he had mentioned the concept in the preface of his book “The Order of Things” to apply to texts. These spaces, as Foucault writes, are disturbing places that “secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance” (xix). The application of the term differs significantly from the heterotopias he outlines in “Of Other Spaces,” but regardless of the lack of defined space in “The Order of Things,” heterotopias deviate from the natural order of the world, having a natural disorder. Despite these other mentions of heterotopias by Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” appears to be the most

comprehensive look at spaces and how they can be used to examine texts, which will be utilized as the main theoretical framework throughout the project.

These heterotopias that Foucault outlines in the original broadcast can be broadly understood using his own terms, as defined throughout his lecture, as “disturbing,” “intense,” “incompatible,” “contradictory,” or “transforming,” and existing outside of all places. As a utopia represents the most perfected version of society, the heterotopia represents society as a place outside of all places, yet still connected to all other places. Utopias are fundamentally unreal, though. Heterotopias can be real spaces that exist somewhere between a utopia and a dystopia, but Foucault most generally defines them as a “placeless places.” Foucault concerns himself with the relations these spaces have with all other sites, and their ability to “suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (24). These sites, then, gain their definitions by their relationships to other spaces.

These heterotopias are “other” or alternate spaces, with several principles that define them as such, but Foucault notes specifically that there are two main categories of heterotopias. The first Foucault mentions are “crisis heterotopias,” which are reserved for individuals in a state of crisis – like menstruating women, adolescents, and elderly people, to cite a few of his examples. These heterotopias are forbidden, and even if we were granted access into these spaces, if an individual were not in “crisis,” this space would not exist for them. These spaces are constantly disappearing, as individuals leave their state of crisis and therefore exit the crisis heterotopia. While these crisis heterotopias are disappearing as individuals leave a crisis state, they are replaced by heterotopias of deviation – the other main category of heterotopias – as a person has deviated from what

they were before (i.e. a pregnant woman becoming a mom after birth, or an adolescent in crisis becoming an adult) and are deviating from the societal norms that defined their previous state. There appears, then, an obvious relationship between heterotopias of deviation and crisis heterotopias – as they appear to constantly be replacing themselves with one the other.

The second half of that relationship and the other main category of heterotopias, heterotopias of deviation, relate to those who behave contrary to societal norms and are therefore placed outside of society. Foucault lists psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and rest homes as some of these heterotopias of deviation – though he remarks that the last of the list is on the borderline of being either a heterotopia of deviation and a crisis heterotopia since old age is a crisis, also “a deviation since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation” (25). Foucault does not outline heterotopias of deviation as clearly or in as detailed a manner as he does crisis heterotopias, but the definitions of the two seems to be inextricably linked throughout the outlining of the principles of heterotopias.

Foucault mentions the term only three times across his vast body of works and seems to contradict his own definitions of the concept from *The Order of Things* (1966) to the lecture in 1967 as “Of Other Spaces.” There are many political critiques of Foucault’s theory and Foucault considers these spaces as not merely places in which objects exist and events happen, but as an element of power, governmentality, and discipline – all concepts devised by the human mind. Through the principles of these heterotopias, it appears that the human perception of these spaces is then what makes these spaces heterotopias. These heterotopias can be real or imagined spaces, but what

constitutes the existence of these heterotopias is the presence of the people in these spaces.

When Foucault begins outlining these principles for crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation, he seems to describe the state of being in which the people exist – like adolescents, menstruating women, or those whose “behavior is deviant in relation to the required means of norm” – and those states of mind allow the space to exist as a heterotopia (5). Foucault in the first principle writes “there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.” (4). While Foucault mentions that there are these physical spaces reserved for these individuals in crisis – like the asylum or a boarding school – interpretations of the theory can extend to Foucault to include imagined spaces. The term “imagined spaces” can then apply to the state of the individual, like the elderly or adolescents, and their relation to the space they inhabit. As these individuals occupy a space, their state of crisis or deviation queer a space, constituting it as a heterotopia.

While spaces can exist physically as heterotopias, these spaces do not have to have concrete or consistent borders and can be merely influenced by the queered states of mind of a person. Foucault exemplifies this when he discusses heterotopias of crisis and those individuals that experience crisis states. Individuals in a state of crisis are compelled to enter certain spaces but are forbidden entrance unless they are in this state of crisis. Foucault cites boarding schools for adolescents as the initial crisis heterotopia, where there is a compulsory element to entrance, but only those in a state of crisis may

enter. Perhaps Foucault's best example of this is the "honeymoon trip," in which a woman's deflowering could take place. It can take place in a hotel room or a train but described as a heterotopia "without geographical markers" (5), considered a heterotopia only by the woman's perception of her own virginity.

Foucault notes that these crisis heterotopias are constantly disappearing, showing that it is the people who are in these heterotopias that define the nature of the space. He writes that crisis heterotopias are constantly disappearing, when individuals exit a state of crisis, but can be replaced by heterotopias of deviation. While the language is not entirely clear in the first principle, the text hints at the idea that individuals who exit a crisis state then enter a heterotopia of deviation – as the queered state of crisis cannot be undone/unqueered, and there is entry to a heterotopia of deviation, which are heterotopias for people who exist contrary to societal norms and placed outside of society. Notably, the principles for these "placeless places" mention more about the state of the people residing in them than they do about what the space itself. A heterotopia of deviation like a psychiatric hospital or a prison cannot exist without patients or inmates. Otherwise, these spaces can simply be viewed as buildings with former functions in relation to society– places with no purpose and are "othered" without the existence of human life queering them. While they are not neutralized or normalized, the "precise and determined function" of these spaces as heterotopias are lost, but a space, much like an individual, cannot be unqueered.

Queered spaces have been relatively unexplored in applications of queer theory, and in the study of heterotopias. Queer spaces have typically been understood as spaces reserved for gays, lesbians, and other queer identities to exist in opposition to

heterosexual, hegemonic spaces. Natalie Oswin argues for a queer geography in “Critical geographies and the uses of sexuality: Deconstructing queer space,” writing that while these spaces have been queered by the presence of queer bodies, the term should extend and challenge heteronormativity in a variety of ways. Oswin cites Lisa Duggan to support her claim, that labelling these spaces only in relation to queer bodies “does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them” (50). The application of the term *queer* extends far beyond sexual identities – as queer is not a synonym for LGBTQ and is instead something that is designated as “other,” or anything exists in the periphery of what is considered the “norm” – and thus demands greater degrees of flexibility and fluidity. The flexibility of the term “queer” and its ability to influence spaces extends to identities and spaces that exist outside of normativity, which allows us to take a queer approach to space. Oswin writes, “with any identity, they obscure particularities and cannot work within the confines of power and normativity,” arguing for a broadening of queer theory’s reach with regards to queer geography (96).

The theory can be looked through a lens of queer theory that allows interpretations through and beyond the simple principles Foucault suggests. The queering of these categories and spaces seems to be at the heart of heterotopias, as these spaces are deliberately “othered.” Foucault’s theory states that these places are contradictory and juxtaposed spaces, leaving room for interpretation that these spaces may only exist in their relation to the people who inhabit them. There exists a power between these spaces, as the people give them definition and deem them “othered,” or heterotopic places. The principles outlined in “Of Other Spaces” allow for an open interpretation to more

appropriately understand human relationships to space and how we determine what makes something “other.” The theory can be applied and expanded using two texts as case studies – *Midsommar*, a 2019 film directed by Ari Aster, and the 2015 novel by Margaret Atwood *The Heart Goes Last*. These two texts present different examples of heterotopias that fit Foucault’s principles, but allow for closer examinations of the characters that primarily influence the state of each space.

While the spaces in *Midsommar* and *The Heart Goes Last* are created by these queered characters, understanding these imagined spaces and the practical applications of Foucault’s theory of heterotopias can help to understand perceptions of reality that currently afflict public consciousness. Inquiry into these texts can help to expand and understand Foucault’s abandoned theory can potentially create revived interest and expand applications of the theory. The project will primarily focus on the first two principles in Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces” regarding heterotopias of deviation and crisis heterotopias, since these principles contain the most explanations for their reasoning and heavily discuss each place as they are described by the people inhabiting them. The disappearance of crisis heterotopias and emergence of heterotopias of deviation suggests that people are constantly entering crisis states and then leaving each state, providing a point of analysis to be explored in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 as Dani exists through most of the film in a crisis state and the ending of the film suggests her entrance into a heterotopia of deviation, while Charmaine and Stan exhibit two characters who are consistently exiting and entering crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation. Some of these exits and entrances are institutionally mandated, as each month they are required to relocate and take up, once again, the identity of either “citizen” or “prisoner.

In *Midsommar*, grieving Dani exists in a certain state of mind that is reflective of a crisis heterotopia after the loss of her family and her perceived impending loss of her relationship with Christian. When Christian and his group of friends – Josh and Mark – are invited to Sweden by their friend, Pelle, to observe the midsummer celebrations of his village, Hårga, Christian feels compelled to invite Dani along for the trip to help patch up their relationship. With the deaths of her family still fresh in her mind, Dani has trouble assimilating to the culture while also feeling at odds with Christian’s friends and the other visiting couple, Connie and Simon, and approaches Christian about leaving, unable to properly process her grief and address the issues in her relationship with Christian. The couple decides to stay as tensions amongst the villagers and Mark, Josh, Connie, and Simon rise, while Dani and Christian become more engrained in the culture of the village.

While Dani becomes entrenched in Hårga’s culture, she still continues to repress her grief, the village of Hårga thrives and becomes more vibrant – a stark contrast to the opening sequence of the film that shows Dani in relative isolation and darkness as she waits to hear back from her sister. Isolated in her own experience of grieving her parents’ and sister’s death, Dani creates the heterotopia of Hårga as a coping mechanism – an imaginary *and* physical space that acts as a playground for the manifestations of her will. While the physical space of Harga exists outside of Dani’s imagination, full of its own pagan histories and culture, it becomes a canvas for Dani to create the world that she desires – with empathy, community, and recognition from the people around her. For the characters, the implications of Dani’s wish-fulfillment fantasy are entirely real and the traditions and history of Hårga itself exist, but the space becomes othered with the entrance of Dani’s burden of grief. The characters in the film find themselves unable to

properly empathize with Dani's experience, or even sympathize in any sort of way – Mark constantly encourages Christian to break up with Dani, Josh is too focused on his academic work, while Connie and Simon act as a foil to Christian and Dani's relationship, showing a “perfect” pairing. Each character seemingly “wrongs” Dani in some way, though she does not explicitly state her feelings to them or confront their treatment of her, allowing for her to further retreat into her manifestations. The chaos that ensues in the latter half of the film depicts punishments unique to each crime against her as a sort of retributive justice, finding forms of torture and death for each character, as well as providing safety for those who were loyal to her in her grieving process.

While Dani has her own relationship with Hårga as an imaginary space, the people and other characters close to Dani have their own relationship to the commune, as the traditions and rituals of Hårga existed long before the arrival of Dani and her friends. Their relation to the world exists as some sort of “other.” The Pagan traditions and rituals practiced by the Hårgans are meant to purge the commune of evil and seem frightening and barbaric to the outsiders. Throughout the film, the morals of the commune are called into question by the characters, showing an inherent binary of “good” and “evil” held by the Western characters in the film and is only heightened as the rituals become more violent and members of the group are forbidden from leaving Hårga. While the traditions of Hårga seem to be concerning, Dani's transitions through the film from being an outsider with Christian and his friends to assimilating and becoming one with Hårga and the other members of the commune. The emotional relationship Dani has with the members of the commune that build up to the final events of the film build the fantastical world of Hårga and blur the lines between real and imagined. Dani, fully engrossed in her

creation and exiting her crisis state of grief, arrives at a heterotopia of deviation as she smiles at the horrors that she's created in Hårga. Chapter 2 will explore these ideas in more depth, specifically Hårga as a physical, heterotopic place with a real history and people, and as an imagined space conjured by Dani as a coping mechanism for her grief. Chapter 2 will lay much of the groundwork for analyzing queer identities and the ways in which these identities work to queer the space they inhabit.

Similarly, chapter 3 will analyze Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last*, which follows Charmaine and Stan, who willingly submit themselves to a prison-like system that offers them a home and security. After losing their jobs and then their home, the couple lived in their car after losing their jobs, their home, and depleting their savings. The country is in the midst of a severe economic crisis, turning the American-Midwest into dystopian wasteland where the dream of living middle class is nonexistent and the survivors have resorted to looting and gang mentality. Despite their misfortunes, Stan and Charmaine rely on their love for each other to protect them against the horrors of the world, despite the Stan's increasing disappointment at his inability to provide for Charmaine and Charmaine's desire for a home and sense of security. Desperate for upward mobility and sense of security, the couple naively sacrifices their freedom for security by signing up for Consilience, a "social experiment" that offers Charmaine and Stan opportunities for employment and a beautiful home in a safe, gated community. While the couple are finally back on their feet, they must serve time as prisoners in the Positron prison every other month while another couple lives in their home during this time. The idea of voluntary imprisonment in the novel presents a state of mind that constitutes the

principles of the heterotopia, as the idea of “voluntary” is inherently contradictory to “imprisonment” and Foucault’s outlined principles of heterotopias of deviation.

The couple sacrifices their freedom for security and the book details their struggle to maintain their relationship when they begin secretive relationships with their “Alternates” – the couple that lives in their house while they are in the Positron prison. There are several examples of heterotopias in the novel, specifically the juxtaposition of Positron and Consilience as a larger institution, but several others that work within the framework of Foucault’s theory and provide for an open interpretation of perceived heterotopias. Foucault specifically references prisons as a form of heterotopias of deviation, but Atwood’s *Consilience* challenges this. Charmaine and Stan are not deviants, unless being poor and unemployed marked the characters as “deviant.” The submission to imprisonment contradicts the very understanding of “imprisonment,” providing an opportunity for analysis of the theory in a way that deconstructs the understanding of heterotopias and consent required for the creation of these spaces. While Atwood presents these institutions as existing separately, these spaces exist simultaneously in crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation. Foucault represents these heterotopias as separate entities, but they exist together, overlapping and encompassing characteristics of both, complicating the theory of “space” as it is known physically.

Defining and understanding the relationship between heterotopias can be useful in our current moment in time. Looking at these two texts with the application of Foucault’s theory, we can gain a better understanding of the current state, which seems to rest on very obvious states of mind by citizens in this country, specifically as we debate the

nature of public and private space. While the outlines of Foucault's theory seem to be rather simple, anything that presents itself as both real and imaginary is far from – and the contradictions that Foucault consistently mentions will be further analyzed through the two texts.

Utilizing *Midsommar* and *The Heart Goes Last* as case studies allows for a practical application of Foucault's theory that expands the theoretical framework of heterotopias to explore the identities of the characters inhabiting these spaces. The inclusion of queer theory as applied to these texts allows for queer categories and spaces, which seems to be at the heart of heterotopia. As heterotopias are inherently “othered” and “queer,” the exploration of these queered spaces and whether these spaces are queered with entrance of the central characters or whether they are existent without these characters suggests a deeper study into the principles initially proposed by Foucault. Firstly, there needs to be some examination of the spaces in which the characters exist in and whether the characters are entering a heterotopia, or a heterotopia is created with their presence – and if the possibility that both can be occurring.

The complication of Hårga as a physical and imagined space as a coping mechanism for the main characters will be further explored in Chapter 2. While Foucault's theory focuses on physical, seemingly real spaces, his principles on crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation allow for an interpretation that these can reflect a created heterotopia – or a certain state of mind held by a person – that could influence a real space. Through an examination of *Midsommar's* main character Dani and the village of Hårga, Foucault's theory can be employed to understand the overlapping between real and imagined spaces as it pertains to Hårga and Dani's queered sense of self influenced

by her grief. The horror in the film is heightened by the fates of these characters being tied to another's version of heterotopia, showing a need for further lines of analysis into the extension of these imagined spaces and the existence outside of the creator's mind. Since Hårga is a very real place with hundreds of years of history, it is most certainly a real space. It is, however, also an imagined space where the main character uses Hårga as the backdrop to her fantasies, condemning those around her to horrible fates that seem fantastical.

The Heart Goes Last allows for a more complicated interrogation of the theory, as the link between created and physical spaces is not as obvious, but the states of its characters are easily identifiable, queering the spaces they inhabit in similar ways. While *Midsommar* seems to have a singular space inhabited throughout the film, Atwood's characters explore several sites and alternate character perspectives, providing their introspections to guide the readers' understanding of how they queer each space. Stan and Charmaine both have queered senses of self, including their perception of their own relationship and the way they relate to the space around them, that contradict the readers' understandings of space. Stan and Charmaine's unstable relationship influence the spaces they inhabit, even when the two are separated. There are several spaces worthy of analyzing in the novel and how they can be understood as heterotopias – Consilience and the Positron prison, the life that Stan and Charmaine lived before entering Consilience, the Vegas residence, and the home that Stan and Charmaine move into after escaping Consilience.

While many of the works of scholarship on heterotopia utilize queer theory, there are few that have examined queer identities in relationship to space. Of the research

conducted for this project, the intersections of identity and space do not often seem to overlap aside from examinations of cultural or religious identities and how they work to define a space, taking a form of anthropological and sociological studies of heterotopias, making this project a seemingly new approach to Foucault's theory. The intentions of this project were to expand Foucault's theory on heterotopias in a way that allowed for some analysis of identities and queered bodies and the way that they can queer a space. Though there are limitations for this application, further research could expand the scope of the theory, while also staying true to Foucault's original text.

While this event is shaping spaces all over the world, it is important that this project be viewed through a uniquely American perspective, as the queered identities of the characters in *Midsommar* and *The Heart Goes Last*. Our relationship to our system and space is already queered by virtue of our resistance to the current administration and the growing disdain Americans, especially younger generations, are having towards our capitalist state. While there are notions of this revolt in both texts, the analysis mostly studies the queered characteristics of the characters and the circumstances leading to their entrances into heterotopias.

Chapter 2 focuses on *Midsommar* and the queered identities of the characters in Hårga – both the Hårgans and the outsiders that come to visit and observe the midsummer celebrations. While the space is queered by Dani, there are certain rites and celebrations that have cultural value to the Hårgans long before Dani and the other Americans' arrival that queer the site. Throughout this chapter, the principles written by Foucault in "Of Other Spaces" are explored and applied to the village of Hårga, including analysis of the Hårgans shared language of empathy, the Ättestupan ritual, and several

heterotopic spaces throughout the village. The central argument postures that Hårga has a cycle of being queered through states of crisis and then deviation leading up to the midsummer festival the film focuses on. While Hårga itself is a queered, physical site, Dani's entrance to the space further queers her, as she uses Hårga as an imagined site for a sort of perverse wish-fulfillment influenced by a crisis state. The latter half of chapter 2 focuses on Dani as a queered character and her relationships to the people around her that influence their fates in the end of the film. The chapter focuses equally on physical and imagined spaces as created by the characters, something gestured to by Foucault in his initial theory. The chapter expands on these principles, while also making a case for their applicability to the text.

Chapter 3 further expands on the principles outlined in Foucault's theory, particularly involving heterotopias of deviation and crisis heterotopias as they are inhabited by queered characters, Stan and Charmaine in Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last*. As the characters are living in a failed capitalist state, the novel explores a system of voluntary imprisonment that acts a facsimile of the heterotopic sites recognizable in our lives today, like the middle-class home. As our own capitalist system begins to mimic the early stages of Atwood's failed, fictional Midwestern American, the chapter explores the heterotopic, and perhaps utopic, idea of the "American Dream" and its meanings for our idealized version of middle-class comfort as the characters pursue it throughout the novel. The chapter attempts to understand Atwood's reasonings for deconstructing traditionally held understandings of prisons, one of Foucault's most recognizable heterotopias, and how it is contextualized to the events of the story.

While *Midsommar* and *The Heart Goes Last* seem to be quite different texts, the conclusion of the project expands on the principles laid out in chapter 2 and 3 and analyzes the overlap between the two texts through a capitalistic lens. While Atwood's text offers a more obvious critique of capitalism, Aster's film is harder to identify and therefore needs further expansion in relation to Atwood's text and Foucault's theory. The conclusion offers points worthy of expansion in regard to Foucault's theory on heterotopic sites, including further analysis on characterizations of "queer" characters outside of the spectrum of queer sexualities and interrogating to what extent a queer character queers a space and renders it "heterotopic." As Foucault's theory on heterotopias seems more amenable to certain genres, the concluding chapter gestures towards genres worthy of studying through a heterotopic lens, including horror, speculative fiction, and Southern Gothic, while offering texts worthy of further analysis through this lens.

CHAPTER 2: Created and Imagined Heterotopias in Ari Aster's *Midsommar* (2019)

“As Hårga takes, so Hårga also gives.”

When Foucault first describes his theory of heterotopias and begins laying the groundwork for the principles that constitute a heterotopia, he states several times that these spaces are “contradictory,” “juxtaposing in a single real place, several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible,” and “implicated by each other” (6). When examining and considering heterotopias in Ari Aster's 2019 film *Midsommar*, then, it is necessary to view the village of Hårga as both a real and imagined space that is contradictory, and that these real and imagined spaces exist simultaneously, while having some notion of incompatibility. The site of Hårga in the film is itself a real space – a space with its own history and people – while also being an imagined space for Dani to enact her will and cope with her grief. While Hårga itself can be seen as an “othered” place due to its seemingly outdated cultural practices, it is perhaps the already “othered” notion of this site that allows for Dani to freely create a new world, used as a means for her to cope with her grief.

Understanding this notion of queered or othered spaces is a relatively new study, having begun as only as recently as 1995 – well after Foucault's discussion of heterotopic spaces in 1967. Research on queered spaces have typically linked the ideas of sexuality and space studies together through a lens of social geography. The field of sexuality and space studies is now well-established, but still a small, sub-discipline that focuses on mapping some of the boundaries of LGBTQ+ people, including “gaybourhoods” and gay villages. The field is born out of the visible clusters of gay people in urban areas and

studying these cultural and social habits – especially in study of sexual behavior and so labelled “gay clubs” and bars, spaces that are dedicated to the freedom of sexual identification as “queer” or other. What makes these bars different from mainstream, or heterosexualized, spaces are the relationship between sexual identity and the space. These spaces – gay villages, bars, gaybourhoods, etc. – are “queered,” or existing outside of the norm as spaces to celebrate queer identities. Without the presence of these queer bodies and identities, then these spaces could exist in the dominant, heterosexualized world. It is these queer bodies, and queer identities, that queer the space, making it a queer space.

While queer geography applies to bodies that exist on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, in this project, “queer” is much more flexible in its application and can extend to those queered bodies that are queered in ways separate from just the study of sexual identity. Queer theory allows for the deconstruction of queerness in relation to factors like race, class, religion, and in through this project, studies of culture and human emotion. Queer identities can then be defined as “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin, 62) and meant to be a foundation to interrogate normativity. Through this lens, we can then begin to identify queer spaces by the bodies that inhabit these spaces – as spaces whose identity is inextricably linked to the bodies that inhabit it and queer it. The relationship between these queer bodies and the space work to queer the space and create these heterotopias mentioned by Foucault.

With this framework in mind, to understand the full characterization of Hårga as a heterotopia, it is first necessary to understand its existence as a queered space and the queered bodies that inhabit it. The physical space of Hårga is understood by the viewers to have existed for centuries, long before the birth of the films’ central characters. The

history of Hårga is only shared briefly throughout the film, and then mostly through mention of the villagers' midsummer traditions, with brief explanations of the economy and sociology of the commune. The American characters in the film – Dani, Christian, Josh, and Mark – are invited to Hårga by their Swedish friend, Pelle, who grew up in the commune and studies in the same graduate anthropology program as Christian and Josh. The trip was meant to be an academic trip for Josh and Christian, as a study of Hårga's midsummer traditions, since Josh was planning to write his thesis on the European midsummer celebrations. Josh's interest in the culture and history of the commune, then, allows for the viewer to learn this history as Pelle retells it to Josh. Even before the arrival to Hårga, Pelle works to provide the link between the real history of Hårga and the imagined world of Hårga as created by Dani through his offering of historical information on Hårga.

Through these conversations with Pelle, the history and geography of the village is revealed throughout several scenes and the viewer is given insight into the life of the villagers, important sites, and the rituals as they occur. The geography of the village seems to be relatively isolated – displaced from other cities or communes in the region of Hälsingland, and the viewers are not privy to any information about the surrounding areas, heightening this isolated feeling. When Dani and the group arrive in Sweden, Pelle explains to them that it is about a four-hour drive to Hårga, where they arrive in a field surrounding the village, and what appears to be miles of open field, flowery fields, seemingly infinite. The characters only arrive in Hårga by walking several miles off the main road and enter through an elaborate entranceway constructed to resemble rays of sun. Foucault notes that many heterotopias are bounded spaces, where

entry to the heterotopic space is “not freely accessible like a public space” and entry is restricted to those who do not have certain permissions or make certain gestures (7). By these rites, Hårga is a bounded space and heterotopia by its guidelines of restricted entrances, and that by the opening and closing of the “borders” of Hårga, they are isolated and penetrable. When entrance is granted, there is no exiting the space.

The sense of excitement amongst the characters shortly after their arrival gives the viewer the sense that Hårga could be a utopia – a place noted by Foucault as “society itself in a perfected form” (24). To the anthropology students, it presents itself as a perfectly preserved society and commune with ancient, Pagan traditions that have been preserved since antiquity, offering the perfect research opportunity for Josh and Christian. As for Mark, Hårga represents an opportunity to travel and hook up with Swedish girls, while Dani uses the trip as an escape from grief and chance to reconcile her relationship with Christian. The never setting sun and dream-like feeling of the village only further enhance this sense of perfection for the outsiders, along with the lack of technology, the open landscaping, Hårga’s isolation from other villages in the region, and the kindness of the villagers who seem far removed from the anxieties of the real world. Foucault mentions in “Of Other Spaces,” however, that utopias are “fundamentally unreal,” whether that means that they are incapable of existing or that anything that presents itself as a heterotopia cannot be physically real, but it becomes apparent shortly after their arrival that Hårga is not a utopia, but more appropriated characterized as a heterotopia.

Dani and her friends immediately perceive extreme differences between the space of Hårga and the American spaces they are used to existing in, as the Hårgans are

recognized by the outsiders as “othered” and existing outside of the norms of the Americans’ culture. When the group arrives, they enter through the elaborate entryway and are greeted by a group of villagers, dressed in traditional Swedish folk dress in white, airy clothing that is stitched with runic symbols with elaborate flower crowns adorning their heads, as some members of the commune play songs on the flute as a welcoming to the guests. While these cultural differences are most apparent, the space itself juxtaposes the opening scenes of the film in America – which are darkly lit, bleak-looking, and happen inside the small, confined spaces of Dani’s apartment. Hårga, however, is dreamlike – the sun never sets and is seeming endless and bright, and surrounded by buildings painted in intense colors that overwhelm the senses. The greenery surrounding Hårga characterizes it as a place that is as alive as the villagers. When Dani and her friends arrive, the group take psychedelic drugs that further heighten the feeling of the village’s aliveness, as the flowers and grass around them seem to breathe with them.

The sense of dreamy isolation and difference is heightened by the physical geography of Hårga being intentionally confused, as there is no establishing shot to ground the viewer in Hårga and we are intentionally taken off the path to a site seldom visited by outsiders. The managed space by the Hårgans is very apparently and deliberately laid out in a way that is much different than the spaces the American spaces the central characters are used to inhabiting. These differences, along with non-continuity editing deliberately make the special geography of the village to the viewer. The camerawork utilized in the film uses long tracking shots that follow the characters as they walk through the village. Though the village looms in the background, the use of medium

shots prioritizes the characters' emotions over the viewers' sense of place in Hårga. Through the film, the viewer never gets a full view of Hårga and how the spaces in the commune relate to one another, though there are glimpses into these significant sites throughout the film in the background. The lack of geographical understanding of Hårga amplifies this dreaminess that the characters feel upon arriving and is particularly important to understand Dani's assimilation into Hårga's culture, since, as in dreams, we find ourselves unable to understand how we have gotten from one place to the next.

Hårga itself is a heterotopia but contains several smaller spaces that can be viewed as heterotopic and queered. These spaces have their own specific functions to the Hårgans and unveil more specific ways the larger space of Hårga is itself heterotopic. Foucault notes that each space has a precise and determined function within each society, and as such, there are several sites in Hårga with specific functions that must be further analyzed, including the roles of the Sacred House, the several houses reserved for the members of the village at different stages of their lives, the valley, and finally the Holy Temple. While Hårga is the larger heterotopia, these spaces exist as smaller heterotopias in Hårga's geography and ultimately contribute to the larger "queered" characteristics of Hårga as a heterotopia. The physical geography of Hårga does not render it queer or "othered," rather the Hårgans make the space heterotopic, though an explanation and attempted understanding of Hårga's geography are essential to understanding the queered states of Hårgans and how these states influence the space of Hårga.

The Hårgans' celebrations of the midsummer traditions queer their identities, and the existence of these queered identities in the space qualify Hårga as

heterotopic. Particularly, the midsummer tradition celebrated in the film is what queers their identities, as it is different from the traditional midsummer celebrations celebrated every other year. The film's midsummer celebration includes all the traditional aspects of midsummer celebrations, along with the violent, Pagan rituals that are known only to the Hårgans that queer their identities. Though it is not directly expressed, some of the rituals observed in the film have direct roots to Swedish midsummer celebrations, like the crowning of the May Queen and dancing around the maypole, which are believed to be originated as a solstice festival set to be carried out during the longest days of sunlight as a celebration for the beginning of summer. These celebrations are believed to bring good fortune and health to the people and livestock, making the tradition especially important to success of the villages.

The Hårgans' celebrations include all the traditional rites and rituals of Swedish midsummer festivals, but the inclusion of the violent Pagan rituals queers their identities and make them deviant from other members of their nationality. Pelle explains that the midsummer tradition depicted in the film is celebrated only once every ninety years, as a way for the villagers to purge their "most unholy Affekts." These Affekts are part of the fictional written language used by the Hårgans that mimics ancient runic alphabets, created by director and writer Ari Aster as part of Hårga's mythology, a language known by only them. Of these Affekts, there are 16 and are graded from most holy to most unholy, though the only Affekt revealed to the viewer is grief. It can be concluded from the information revealed in the film and Aster's production notes that these Affekts are symbolic of human emotions, and that these most unholy Affekts are then the most evil and wicked. Through the midsummer tradition the viewer observes, the celebration that

occurs must happen in order for the villagers to purge this wickedness and symbolizes some sort of baptism or cleansing of the spirit of the Hårgans.

The need to purge these unholy Affekts is unique to the Hårgans and the insistence of purging these evils represents a sort of crisis state. Foucault writes that these crisis states are “reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (4). The Hårgans believe that the continued survival and success of their village hinges on the celebration of this midsummer tradition, which characterizes them in a state of crisis as they await the successful completion of these rituals. While the village is only revealed to the viewers in their crisis states, it can be assumed that there is a cycle of the villagers entering these crisis states – every ninety years as they need to purge evil in the village – and then entering into heterotopias of deviation while they wait for the next crisis. Since the ceremony occurs only once every ninety years, the villagers enter this crisis state only once in their lives and spend the time leading up to and after the celebration in a heterotopia of deviation. These heterotopias of deviation are spaces where “those individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed,” and are what Foucault remarks are the next in the cycle after the crisis state. The Hårgans peculiar traditions are seemingly different from other Swedish midsummer traditions, characterizing them as deviant when they are not in these crisis states and placing them in a crisis state every 90-year years leading up to the special midsummer celebration. Thus, Hårga is placed in a cycle of crisis heterotopias or heterotopias of deviation depending on the queered state of the villagers.

The idea of cycles is particularly applicable to the Hårgans' philosophies of aging and different "seasons" of life, which is mentioned directly by Foucault as a crisis. In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault lists adolescents and the elderly, as well as the idea of "coming of age," as states of crisis with which we enter repeatedly throughout our lives, mirroring these states of crises and deviation. Foucault wrote that "heterotopias of crisis are disappearing and are being replaced ... by what we might call heterotopias of deviation," elaborating by adding that "deviation" is reflective of "those whose behavior is deviant to the required mean or norm are placed" (25). Throughout their lives, the Hårgans track these seasons of life and have spaces reserved for each of the seasons. While the Ättestupan is a space reserved for the end of life, there are several houses spread throughout the village for each season of life. The viewer does not get a chance to see each of these spaces, but are shown the Main House, where the villagers stay until they turn 36, when they then move to the Laborers' House. From the outside, the Main House has barn-like features and in the inside, there is two-floor communal living with an open structure, where the central characters of the film stay.

Siv emphasizes the Hårgans belief in life as a circle, that as one thing falls, another raises. Those that died in the Ättestupan ritual will be reborn into the commune, as pregnant mothers rename the children of those fallen. The cycle of life, then, represents these cycling through states of crisis and deviation, as Foucault mentions in his theory. Through the constant cycling through life and the different life stages noted by Pelle, Hårgans' relationship through "seasons" of their lives – birth to 18 is the spring, summer is 18 to 36, fall is 36 to 54, and the winter is 54 to 72 – and the beginning of each season can be noted as a crisis, as the individuals are aware of their aging selves. The

cliff is one of the most important heterotopic sites in the film, where the plot of the film starts to escalate and many of the outsiders become uncomfortable with the rituals the Hårgans are performing, as there is a direct confrontation between the Hårgans' beliefs and the outsiders. In their own culture, separate from the reactions of the outsiders, the space represents the ending of one life and the beginning of the next – the place where the cycle both ends and begins.

The Hårgans' celebrations of the midsummer traditions queers their identities, and the existence of these queered identities in Hårga makes it a heterotopia. Their identities cycle through these states of crisis and deviation, following the pattern of the seasons and their relationship to the midsummer traditions they celebrate every year. The need for the celebration of these rituals by the Hårgans is their belief in these antiquated traditions and some shared sense of panic that if these rituals are not completed, Hårga will be laid to ruin. The shared value sets of the Hårgans creates a collective crisis and influences the space as a crisis heterotopia or heterotopia of deviation. Since the village is relatively isolated, geographically, from other communities in the region of Hälsingland, the sense of connectedness and collective consciousness of the Hårgans is further heightened, along with the absence of any technology that would allow them to have some communication with outside villages.

The rituals are exemplars of a crisis state, occurring once only ninety years and working as a way for the villagers to purge evil through the committing of violent and gruesome acts. The first of such occurs early in the film, named Ättestupan, which Pelle explains happens at the end of the “winter stage of a man's life,” or from the age of 54 to the end at 72. The ceremony involves those who have reached the end of this winter stage

of their lives committing senicide by leaping from the top of a cliff while the members of the commune watch below. Siv, the matriarchal leader of the commune, explains that the Ättestupan is a tradition long held by the Hårgans and a great honor for those who reached the end of their lifecycle, despite the gruesome nature. The Hårgans believe that it is a beautiful celebration of the end of the lifecycle and join in matching the pained yells of those who don't perish immediately after their falls, since the Hårgans first language is emotion and their private language emphasizes community feeling. Their yelling is reflective of this shared sense of pain, a significant moment when the villagers vocalize communally in empathy with those in the ritual. The ritual calls for the sacrifice of their life, "out of gratefulness ... before [they] can spoil it," as they believe that it is better to die than grow old and dying in pain and fear.

The Ättestupan is celebrated every midsummer celebration, sending off individuals at the end of their winter season, there are other traditions that are important to the understanding of Hårgans' queered identities. The queered notions of these rites and rituals stems from their antiquated place in the ceremonies – as they seem to be an outdated measure of choosing who to be the May Queen. Like the village that is perfectly preserved since antiquity, the rituals seem frozen in time and their continued practice by the Hårgans is representative of their continued queered states. One such tradition is that of the May Queen ceremony, which the women of the village compete in each midsummer. The girls partake in psychedelic drugs and dance until they drop, and the last girl remaining then becomes the May Queen, an esteemed and coveted title in the commune. The May Queen, while not explicitly stated in the film, can be understood through traditional Swedish culture as the personification of the holiday and her duty is to

begin the midsummer celebrations. Considered to be a symbol of good luck and prosperity, the May Queen then bestows her blessings on the crops and livestock. The role of the May Queen plays a particular importance in the ending ceremonies, and the also the last ritual depicted in the film.

The final ceremony is perhaps the greatest example of the queered identities of the Hårgans, one that includes all the public and private rituals that have occurred in the village up until this point in the film. To conclude their special midsummer celebration, the commune sacrifices nine human lives to give thanks to the sun and purify the community of evil – stating that “As Hårga takes, so Hårga also gives.” Those sacrificed includes four of the outsiders, or “newbloods,” four Hårgans, and the final to be chosen by the May Queen. Those that sacrificed their lives for Hårga’s continued success, then are returned to “Everything,” after their bodies are burned by setting fire to the Sacred House, the epitomic heterotopia, while one of the Hårgans dress as “Vidorr,” the god of vengeance, and he is symbolically vanished from Hårga along with the most unholy Affekts of the villagers.

While the entirety of Hårga represents a heterotopia, the Sacred House is most heterotopic space in the village – as it represents the very culmination of Hårga’s rites and traditions, the heart of their queered identities where the sacrifices are placed and returned back to the earth. It is the need to sacrifice and celebrate these rituals that qualifies the placement in a crisis state. Since the queer identities and states of individuals allows for the classification of a space as “heterotopic,” the preparation of the bodies is perhaps the most important defining characteristic of the Sacred House. The bodies of the nine sacrifices are submitted to the different rituals and practices – the two

Hårgans who were sacrificed in the Ättestupan, the four outsiders who were captured and killed, two Hårgan volunteers, and the final sacrifice chosen by the May Queen – that make this space heterotopic by the participation in these rites, whose benefit is received by the surviving villagers. The Hårgans belief in the cycle of life continues into death, furthering queering these bodies into the afterlife, as the deceased spirits are then returned to “Everything,” presumably to Hårga to ensure the banishment of all evils in the village and for Hårga’s continued prosperity.

For Foucault, spaces such as Hårga are not merely places where objects and people exist and where events happen, but as an executor of power and discipline. Hårga continues to exist because of this power it has over the Hårgans. Hårga, in its traditions and history, has a power over its subjects – helping them to continue these traditions – while the Hårgans have their own power over the land by perpetuating these rituals. Hårga is a heterotopic space because of the history of its people – the people acting as the agents that queer the space. Much like the seasons of life that the Hårgans believe, there is a cycle of queering that the Hårgans and Hårga are a part of. The physical space of Hårga is queered through the practices of these rites and rituals practiced by its people throughout history. As Hårga thrives and continues, its people follow the traditions of those who inhabited the space before them, persisting this cycle of queering.

In the complicated events of the film, however, the Hårgans are not the only agents that queer make the space heterotopic. Hårga and its numerous heterotopic spaces and queer individuals pose an interesting contrast to Dani’s character, whose recent experience of grief and loss characterize her as a queer character. While

Dani's loss of her family is not enough to "queer" her character, her connectedness to her family, especially her sister, and her sudden loneliness without an emotional network. Dani's grief is a crisis that queers her identity – it is all consuming and at the forefront of her identity, guiding her interactions with Christian and others around her, though these interactions are guided by others' discomfort with her grief. Dani is introduced initially as someone who feels deeply responsible for her family and boyfriend, showing a deeper connectedness to those around her and a selflessness in her concern, especially after receiving a particularly concerning email from her sister, Terri. Through phone conversations with her boyfriend, Christian, and another friend who is never named, Dani reveals that her sister is bipolar and seems to frequently have manic episodes that Dani often attends to. While Dani should be worrying about her family and the email she had received from her sister, when she speaks with her friend, she shares that she is more concerned with her relationship with Christian and that she is roping him into her family life too much, displaying a pattern of her sister leaning on Dani too much, and Dani feeling that she leans on Christian too much. As the emotional support system to both her family and Christian, she is left without any one to tend to her emotions.

When it is revealed to the viewer that Dani's sister had killed herself and her parents through carbon monoxide poisoning, Dani enters a crisis state as she becomes the last remaining member of her family and must grieve the loss of her family with only Christian to rely on, who feels pressured to stay with her due to her bereavement and out of a sense of duty, rather than love. Until Dani arrives at Hårga, many of the scenes show Dani navigating the next six months of her life in a sort of haze, spending long hours in

her apartment alone or with Christian, or surrounded by people but unable to connect anybody around her. Even Christian seems unable to connect with Dani, displayed through several shots of him staring absentmindedly while he holds her or approaching her tentatively while she lays in bed attempting to sleep. When Christian and his friends announce that they are going to spend the summer in Sweden, Dani confronts him for not communicating this with her, while also reeling at his potential loss for even a few weeks – having built a codependency on him.

Through many of the opening scenes, Dani's queered identity appears most obviously to stem from the loss of her family, but her identity is equally queered through her toxic relationship with Christian. Christian appears to have little to no interest in his relationship with Dani, doing the bare minimum to keep her in his life and struggling properly empathize with her situation. The more Dani seems to rely on him, the more he pulls away from her, shown through his half-hearted interactions with her and nonchalant handling of her emotions. After leaving the party where the trip was revealed to Dani, she and Christian have a disagreement about it, as Dani feels upset that Christian did not tell her that he would be going and Christian gaslights her into feeling bad over her concern. Rather than acknowledging Dani's concern, Christian plays the victim and puts Dani on the defensive. She profusely apologizes, though Christian seems inconvenienced by this and dispassionately extends an invitation to Sweden.

Many of the queered characteristics of Dani's identity stem from other relationships in her life, including the relationship with Christian's friends, Josh and Mark, who evoke a sense of insecurity and longing in her. Dani longs for any sort of connection with Christian and shows some sort of longing to understand him in the same

way that Josh and Mark do. This sense of insecurity stems from the coldness of Josh and Mark's interactions with her, especially after Christian invites Dani to Sweden. Josh and Mark's apparent disdain for Dani further complicates the invitation to Sweden because of their seeming indifference to her presence, at best. Mark is visibly upset by Christian's invitation to her, but Christian reassures him and Josh that while Dani has accepted, she will not actually be joining them. This scene is shown to the viewer, but is unknown to Dani, validating her feelings of insecurity. The scenes before the trip show Dani attempting to connect with Mark, who had shared his dislike of Dani to Christian in the opening scenes of the film and repeatedly urged him to break up with her, and Josh, who seems disinterested in Dani and more focused on his academic work, but ultimately failing. While Dani initiates this attempt at a connection with Josh and Mark, they are unsure of how to approach interactions with her in a queered, grief state and seem only inclined to reach out to her because of the loss of her family.

The only character who seems to feel comfortable approaching Dani in her crisis state is Pelle, the Swedish friend who invited the group to Sweden and is a queered body himself, having come from Hårga. In their first interaction in the film, Pelle is the first character to offer his condolences on screen to Dani, causing her to break down in front of him, commencing an interesting relationship between two differently queered characters. Pelle had a similar loss in his life, losing both parents when he was young, and confiding this in Dani, though he does not claim to be like her or understand exactly what she is going through and showing her more empathy than any other character.

Pelle provides the link between this real and imagined space in Hårga since he is the only person who sees and identifies Dani's queered state. When Pelle provides his condolences to Dani, he recognizes that while he lost his parents when he was young, he can never fully understand what she is going through. As a Hårgan, Pelle is a queered character himself and his influence on Dani works to queer her, while also liberating her from Christian and ties to the physical world. Pelle explains that the Hårgans "first language here is strictly emotion-based," showing the emphasis of empathy amongst the villagers and an understanding of deeper understanding of emotions than the outsiders are used to experiencing. This shared language of empathy shared by the Hårgans is something that Pelle employs, offering Dani the empathy and tenderness she desperately craves from Christian, stating in the beginning scenes of the film that he thinks it was very good of her to come to Hårga and that she will be able to fit in well with the rest of the commune. When Dani is upset after the Ättestupan, Pelle is the one who comforts her – informing her of the power of the community in Hårga and when he lost his parents, he never had the opportunity to feel loss because of the deep comfort offered by the Hårgans. In Dani's crisis state, she is easily vulnerable and tempted by this idea of family, especially when Pelle asks her about Christian, saying "Do you feel held by him? Does he feel like home to you?" and Dani has no reply.

Before her link to Pelle, her arrival in Hårga shows Dani's inability to cope with her grief, making her much more susceptible to the heterotopic site of Hårga. Her insecurities and longing for normalcy are only heightened by the group's arrival in Hårga, a strange new site devoid of any of the familiarity and comfort of her home, and her inability to connect with Christian or any members of the group. Her

initial vulnerabilities are exposed when Pelle's brother, Ingemar, offers the group psychedelic mushrooms before they make the journey on foot to Hårga, which Dani initially refuses, but gives into after feeling pressure from Mark – longing for some connection to the rest of the group. While Christian does stand up for Dani at this point, it appears unenthusiastic and Dani eventually gives in, despite feeling uncomfortable. As Dani and the other members of their group start to feel the psychedelic effect of the drugs, the grass and trees around them breathing as if alive, the first instance of the group becoming physically a part of Hårga before they arrive to the small, isolated commune. Notably, when Dani looks down at her hand, it appears that grass has grown through her skin and begins breathing with the rest of the plants – almost as if she has the greatest connection to the space. Since Dani is the person most deprived of her group, she is particularly susceptible to notions of belonging and inclusion, something she is not receiving from any of her American companions, even her boyfriend.

Her trip is overwhelmed by her queered state, where she is unable to pretend that she is no longer affected by her grief and becomes triggered by the group's discussion of family, especially with her feelings of alienation from the group. When Dani leaves the group upset, shaking off Christian's offer to join her, she stumbles upon other groups of people the same age laughing, something she interprets as them laughing at her, further heightening this feeling that she is different from everyone. Though Ingemar reassures her no one is laughing at her, Dani cannot shake this feeling, overwhelmed by a feeling of emotional isolation only amplified by the drugs. This emotional isolation is part of what queers her, thus making Hårga an even more attractive and compelling place for her. Dani secludes herself in a completely dark outhouse, a stark

contrast to the fields outside of Hårga, that is reminiscent of the opening scenes of the film where Dani is isolated in her apartment. Looking in the mirror, the viewer can see a brief glimpse of Dani's sister behind her in the mirror – symbolic of Dani's inability to separate herself from her state of grief and allows for a creation of a space as a coping mechanism. Her sister's position behind her in the mirror and disappearance when she faces the physical world is representative of a self-conception that her sister is still a part of her even though she's not longer alive, as a half of her that will never have access to the other half. Though she tries to escape her grief by coming to Hårga with Christian, she is unable to, as the responsibility and connection she feels to her sister follows her. When she glances over her shoulder though, her sister disappears, and Dani is left looking in the mirror as her face becomes deformed looking, and she runs out into the woods, still breathing and moving around her, terrified.

In Foucault's speech, he directly addresses this idea of mirrors as a sort of "placeless place," at once both a utopia and heterotopia that resembles some sort of mixed experience of real and imagined. These reflections on the mirror as this "placeless place" is complex and somewhat contradictory, as heterotopias themselves are, but Foucault writes that the mirror "makes the place that is occupied at the moment in the glass absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there" (24). Foucault believes that through the mirror, we have the ability to reconstitute where we are, classifying the space as heterotopic. When looking through a mirror, we are looking at a version of ourselves that is surrounded by a space that does not exist. Through the mirror, Dani is able to reconstitute, or alter, her perception of the

world, giving her control over the creation of the space she inhabits – as she is perceiving herself in a space that does not exist, and this perception is influenced by her crisis state. Though the mirror is not present throughout the duration of the film, Dani’s entrance into the bathroom and glimpse into the mirror suggests that Dani is at a turning point in her crisis state where she is both real and unreal – creating something that is undeniably real in an unreal space.



Hårga still exists as a physical space, but as tensions escalate in Dani and Christian’s relationship and Dani begins to lose her grip on reality, moments from Dani’s imagination start to creep into the space, as she is aware of this ability to create after glancing in the mirror. After Dani awakes in the woods, the group treks several miles into the woods to Hårga, entering through an entryway resembling rays of sunlight. The space is dreamlike, entrancing Dani and those around her, and the viewer sees a genuine smile from Dani as she looks around the village in awe and evoking the sense that Dani feels

connected to Hårga. While the festivities of the midsummer celebration begin, the tone of the film shifts to one of curiosity, one that is lighter, temporarily abandoning the heavy tones of grief that weighed Dani down prior to her arrival. The lightness in tone is partially attributed to the shift in focus, as other characters and their experiences start to come into focus. Rather than being depicted alone or as part of her relationship to Christian, she befriends Connie and Simon – an engaged couple from England brought to Hårga by Ingemar – and also starts becoming closer to Pelle, the link between Hårga the physical space and Hårga the imagined space.

The tensions in Dani and Christian's relationship are present from the opening scenes of the film, but their relationship starts to take a more drastic downturn after arriving in Hårga, as they seem less reliant on each other and start to become enmeshed in the village and its people. Despite revealing to his friends that he wanted to break up with Dani in the beginning of the film, the death of her family guilted Christian into staying in the relationship, thinking that he is helping Dani by staying with her and delaying her heartbreak. Hårga, however, feels like an entirely different world to the two of them – so far removed from the loss Dani had experienced at home and allowing her to *almost* separate herself from her grief. Rather than being depicted alone or with Christian, Dani begins to open up to other people around her and allow herself to see the problems in their relationship. While Christian has played an attentive boyfriend, after arriving in Hårga, he starts to become more focused on the people and spaces around him, even forgetting Dani's birthday until he is reminded of it by Pelle. Though Christian forgets her birthday, Pelle wishes her happy birthday by gifting her with a drawing of her in a flower crown similar to the ones the girls of Hårga wear and prompting Dani to tell

Pelle that Christian forgot her birthday. Pelle gives her a concerning look, to which Dani replies that she “forgot to remind him.”

Dani begins to feel more confident as she becomes part of Hara, enough so that she begins to stand up for herself in the face of Christian’s neglect and disinterest, especially when faced with a couple who is the opposite of them. The initial tensions rise shortly after when Connie and Simon ask the two how long they had been together, to which Christian wrongly answers three and a half years and Dani awkwardly corrects him in front of the group. The incompatibility between Christian and Dani is contrasted in this moment to Connie and Simon, the engaged couple from England, who are very affectionate with each other, always holding hands or with their arms around one another, and frequently shown on screen being affectionate – quite opposite to the relationship shown between Dani and Christian who act cold to one another and are not shown being affectionate and are not warm to each other.

While Hårga exists as a physical space for most of the characters and each character is brought to Hårga for their own reason, Dani utilizes Hårga as a guide to creating her own heterotopic space, one where she can enact her violent will against those who she has felt have wronged her. Dani’s relationship with Christian begins to fall apart throughout the course of the film before she finally enacts her will on him, but there are challenges to this. The conflict in their relationship contrasted by Connie and Simon’s seemingly perfect relationship poses challenges to Dani, who in her crisis of grief does not want to believe that her relationship with Christian could be falling apart after everything she has already experienced. Having their relationship flaunted in front of her emphasizes the distance between her and Christian, shown through their physical distance

between one another and Connie and Simon's constant displays of affection to one another. Connie and Simon's relationship is a depiction to Dani of everything she wants her relationship with Christian to be, but is not.

In Dani's disassociated crisis state, her heterotopic creation allows for her to inflict cruel punishments on these people with Connie and Simon as the first victims. The Ättestupan ceremony marks a turning point, where the violence of the elderly Hårgans' death heightens her grief to a point where she begins to separate herself from reality and create an imagined space to cope with this grief she feels. After the Ättestupan ceremony when Connie and Simon become uncomfortable with the violent events that are taking place in the commune, they become physically separated. While Dani and Christian have a disagreement afterwards with Dani wanting to leave and Christian begging her to stay, Connie and Simon present a united front – angry at the gross display presented to them at the Ättestupan and make plans to leave immediately. They return to the Main House to gather their things, but Simon has gone missing and the Hårgans misinform Connie that he has left early to catch a car for them, despite Connie's pleas that he would never leave without telling her. Shortly after, Connie tries to escape, and they are not mentioned again until the end of the film when their bodies are brought to the Sacred House for the final ceremony.

The off-screen deaths of the characters and the lack of questioning at their absence shows an inability of Dani to accept what is occurring in Hårga at her behest, showing some sort of resistance to enter this imaginary state of Hårga. Her constant questioning and concern over where Connie and Simon while the others are assured of their safety shows Dani's understanding of what happens to them, but an unwillingness to

accept it until the final events of the film. When their bodies are finally brought back for the final celebration, it appears that Connie had drowned to death – as her hair appears stringy and damp as she is wheeled to the Sacred House. Simon’s fate is revealed to be much more horrifying than Connie’s and when he is found by Christian, his body is suspended midair with his arms outstretched, facing downward while his lungs are held outside of his body by flora-decorated ropes, and his eyes picked out and replaced by flowers, while his lungs appear to still be breathing. Their only crime against Dani appear to be that the relationship was a source of envy and one that forced her to confront the problems in her own relationship. While she seemed not to have much use for Connie, Simon’s cutting open suggests some sort of examination by Dani, almost as an inquiry into what makes someone like Simon a better significant other to Connie than Christian was to her. Naturally then, it had to be Christian who found Simon after his infidelity and face his mistreatment of Dani head on. When Simon and Connie are wheeled to the Sacred House to participate in the final celebrations, Dani does not seem shocked or upset by their deaths.



While Simon certainly got the worst punishment from Dani, Mark and Josh received punishments equal to their crimes against Dani in her crisis state. Of the characters in the film aside from Christian, Mark appears to have harmed Dani the most – constantly urging Christian to break up with her to pursue other women, ignoring her completely in Switzerland, and never offering his condolences to Dani after the death of her family. After Mark urinates on the ancestral tree, where all of Hårgans' dead are spiritually tied to, and upsetting the Elder, he disappears sometime after dinner. His death also occurs off-screen, though shortly after his death, his face is used to lure Josh into his death. Josh's crimes are somewhat similar to Mark's, although not to the same extent. Where Mark actively roots against Dani and her relationship with Christian, Josh continuously ignores Dani, preferring his studies to comforting Dani and encourages Christian to take his studies more seriously, thus taking the attention away from Dani. Like Mark, he never offers condolences to her or seems sympathetic, rather choosing to selfishly pursue his academic research and his only meaningful relationship is with Pelle, and only because he provides a link to the history of Hårga's traditions. Fittingly, Josh is killed when he sneaks into the Holy Temple and attempts to take pictures of the *Rubi Radr* after being instructed that he is not allowed. Aside from the two elderly Hårgans in the *Ättestupan*, Josh's death is the first shown on screen at this point in the film. The killer is not revealed, though whoever it is wears Mark's face, a terrifying prospect that is unexplored in the film, to distract him before another person beats him across the head with a hammer.

Josh's on-screen death is the first moment that Dani is finally able to confront the demented world she has created, using Hårga as a backdrop. Josh's indifference

towards Dani is perhaps why Dani feels a particular indifference towards his death, finally showing on-screen the death of someone who had wronged her. While it is not Dani herself who is doing the killing, the world she created, and her deepening crisis queers her identity and allows her to further retreat into the imagined heterotopia and offering her consent to kill those she feels have acted against her. Like the mirror, the space of Hårga is both real and unreal at this point – a space that is perceivable, yet an almost “placeless place” where these atrocities can occur. For the characters of Connie, Simon, Josh, and Mark, the horrors and permanency of death are absolutely real – though it is unclear who is enacting them. Though it is not understood by Dani at this point, the Hårgans language of empathy allows them to sense Dani’s pain and enact punishments fitting to their rituals that can appease her darkest senses. While the Hårgans have a sense of Dani and what she desires, the only person who understands her crisis state and queered body is Pelle, the link between Hårga the physical space and Hårga the imagined space.

Dani further retreats into her queered state with encouragement from Pelle, something that helps her begin to separate herself from Christian and her continued integration with the village. After the disappearance of Josh and Mark, Dani and Christian begin spending more time apart from one another – Christian working on his thesis and Dani becoming involved with the daily life of the village through cooking and helping prepare the next ceremonies. It becomes apparent in their interactions that they are on different wavelengths, especially when Dani becomes concerned for the disappearances of Mark and Josh and Christian announces that they do not associate with them as friends after they were accused of stealing the *Rubi Radr*. The shock in Dani’s

face says it all, but before they can have a conversation about it, they are separated for the dancing competition, where Dani once again doses psychedelic drugs, along with the other young girls in the competition.

Dani's participation in the May Queen competition appear to be her final moments of lucidity before she retreats into the imagined space of Hårga, as her winning of the May Queen crown solidifies her place as a Hårgan and begins the separation of her identity from Christian. While Dani dances in the May Queen competition, she looks out into the crowd of gathered villagers and attempts to make eye contact with Christian, who refuses to look at her. Despite this, Dani continues to laugh and enjoy the dance, becoming assimilated to the culture and community of Hårga. She is dressed in the same traditional white dresses of the other Hårgan girls, with her hair done up in an elaborate braid and secured by a flower crown. The plants and grass breathe with her and the other girls in the circle smile and join hands with her throughout the dance. While pausing in between the dance, she looks down to her feet to see that the grass has grown through her feet, symbolizing a further transition into this imagined space, realized when she wins the May Queen competition after being the last dancer standing. When she is crowned, Pelle congratulates her by passionately kissing her – offering her comfort and encouragement to fully lose herself in this place. Following the competition, the Hårgans hold a celebration dinner where Dani sits at the head of the table and leads everyone through their final feast of the midsummer celebrations. The Hårgans look to her as their leader, following her in her ways and celebrating her presence. In this moment, Dani becomes fully aware of the world she has created and her ability to continue in its creations,

though she is still concerned with Christian – the only person keeping her tied to the real world.

The Hårgans are aware of Dani's final tie to the world being Christian, and to encourage Dani's immersion into the imagined site, offer participation in one of their sexual rites as a test to see if Christian's dedication to Dani matches hers. While Dani was dancing, Christian was invited to view the Hårgans' sexual rites after it is revealed by one of the Hårgan Elders that he was approved to mate with one of the girls, Maja, who has had her sights set on Christian since before he came. He protests a bit, citing Dani as his reason, but eventually is convinced to join Maja and meets her in the Holy Temple afterwards. They engage in intercourse while the other women from the commune surround him, nude and moaning to encourage him – their moans echoing through the village – as the village is a place of community and connection, especially when Americans would feel the need for privacy. When Dani questions where Christian is, the members outside of the ceremony discourage her from looking for him, but she eventually finds him and sees him engaging with Maja in the Holy Temple. As Christian is the remaining thing tying her to this physical world, she feels devastated at his loss and returns to the Main House, breaking down and letting out deep, anguished sobs. Several of the Hårgan girls who stay with Dani follow her and sit with her on the floor, matching her wails and breathing, genuinely empathizing with her screaming and letting her feel the full weight of her loss. The Hårgans' matching of Dani's cries shows that they have empathized with her and initiated her into the group, allowing for Dani to finally find another group she can belong to communally after the loss of her family, and now Christian.

Christian's participation in Hårga's sexual rites represents his separation from Dani's identity, the last thing tying her to the physical world, and revealing to him the manifestations of Dani's will when the bodies of the missing outsiders reappear in the final ceremony and marking Dani's full immersion into her imagined space. When Christian completes the ceremony with Maja and then finds Simon's body in the chicken coop, he is blindsided by one of the Hårgan men who blows a brown powder into his face, paralyzing him. Dani and Christian do not meet again after this, except for the final and ninth offering. As the May Queen, Dani is honored by getting to choose the final offering – between a randomly selected Hårgan or Christian. Dani, still reeling from Christian's betrayal, sits atop the stage, fully covered in flowers from head to toe with only her face revealed, while she wears a pained expression and holds back tears and eventually becomes neutral. The villagers wait on her choice and Dani answers silently, never breaking eye contact with Christian. The other sacrifices – Connie, Simon, Josh, Mark, and the two elderly Hårgans from the Ättestupan – are wheeled and placed in the Sacred House alongside Ingemar and Ulf, two living members who will be burned alive during the ceremony. Christian, the final sacrifice, is sewn into the corpse of a dead bear, and placed in the center of the Sacred House, with the other sacrifices placed against the walls. One of the Hårgans, dressed as “Vídorr”, the god of vengeance, sets fire to the Sacred House, stating directly to Christian that with this fire, the village will be purged of all their wickedness. Outside of the Sacred House, Dani looks with an expression of indifference, still dressed in her May Queen dress. Christian, her last remaining tie to the physical world, is now gone – burned in the fire – while the Hårgans around her mimic the screams of those being burned alive.

Initially, Dani's face is marked with indifference, unsure of how she feels. While she is still reeling from his betrayal, she is now imagining this world without Christian. Standing directly in the center of the Hårgans and closest to the burning Sacred House, Dani appears to be their leader and with no remaining ties to the physical world, though finally feeling a part of a family who empathizes and places her first. The Hårgans felt the betrayal Dani felt at the hands of these people, and through the purging of evil in the village, carry out her will for her – starting with Connie and Simon and finishing with Christian. As the Sacred House continues to burn, the smoke lingers around her and makes the space seem even more dreamlike, as she looks on and begins to smile. Her transition into the imagined heterotopia becomes fully realized as her feelings are validated, and she recovers her lost family through this connection with the Hårgans.

Chapter 3: Deconstructing Queered Identities and Heterotopias in Margaret Atwood's

The Heart Goes Last (2015)

"Oblivion is increasingly attractive to the young, and even to the middle-aged, since why retain your brain when no amount of thinking can even begin to solve the problem?"

Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood's 2015 novel *The Heart Goes Last* poses challenges to Foucault's theory on heterotopias and states of mind that lead to heterotopic characterizations of space. The novel contains several themes relating to principles outlined in Foucault's theory that are reflective of crisis heterotopias or heterotopias of deviation. In a general study of Foucault's heterotopias, spaces like prisons are often noted as one of the most obvious heterotopic sites and seemingly easily categorized as heterotopias of deviation. These heterotopias of deviation are spaces where people whose behavior is deviant in relation to the norm are placed, and the prison seems like the most obvious example of this. Deviant members of society are placed in prison as a means to rehabilitate them to return to society, but Atwood's novel poses a dilemma to several notions of Foucauldian notions of imprisonment. As prison is meant to be a punishment and rehabilitative measure for deviant individuals, imprisonment in the novel is offered as a choice for those who have no other options against the ruthless dystopia that the United States has become. The idea of voluntary imprisonment in the novel is representative of a specific state of mind, one that constitutes the principles of the heterotopia, as the idea of "voluntary" is inherently contradictory to "imprisonment," as

heterotopic spaces can invert relationships between spaces and be contradictory, as the nature of “voluntary imprisonment” suggests.

The idea of voluntary imprisonment suggests some deconstruction of stable binaries and our understandings of the identity of a “prisoner.” Prisons as an institution are designed as punishment for those who have been judged as deviants after breaking some law or societal norm. At their best, prisons work as a means to rehabilitate inmates and return them to society as civilians capable of following norms and at the least, discourage people from committing crimes as a way to avoid imprisonment. As a prisoner, a person is stripped of their civilian identity and given the identity of prisoner, which affords them no rights and barely enough to survive. The harsh treatment of prisoners in the United States, particularly, represents a state of bare life in which prisoners are merely trying to survive day to day until release, or if there is no release, make the best of life that they can.

The principle of voluntary imprisonment in *The Heart Goes Last* contradicts our very understanding of “imprisonment,” leading to questions about the identities of individuals that would submit to such a thing. While Atwood presents the institutions of Consilience, the city where Stan and Charmaine exist freely, and the adjacent Positron prison as existing separately, these spaces exist simultaneously through crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation. Foucauldian theory would categorize these heterotopias as separate entities, but they exist together, overlapping and encompassing characteristics of both, complicating the theory of “space” as it is known physically as in the novel, and they are indeed seen as a unit in the novel – much like Stan and Charmaine’s partnership.

The overlapping heterotopic sites are most likely influenced by the queered nature of the main characters, Stan and Charmaine, and to understand the spaces in the novel, it is first necessary to analyze the queered identities of the main characters in the novel and their relationship to the spaces that they inhabit. The novel switches points of view between the two main characters, Stan and Charmaine, a destitute married couple living in their car after suffering the loss of their home. The situation is not unique to Stan and Charmaine though, as the Midwestern United States has turned into a devastated landscape where bandits roam free and unpunished and what-used-to-be the middle class is at their mercy. Despite being one of the many affected by the economic failure of the Midwest, both characters take the loss of their jobs personally and feel that there was something they could have done to ensure that they were an exception to the rule. Stan and Charmaine's world exists in the confines of the car they live in – the only thing they were able to escape with after they both lost their jobs and then their home – with their interactions primarily being with each other.

The couple's identities seem to mirror stereotypical Midwestern identities and chasing of a white picket fence fantasy. Prior to the loss of their jobs, Stan and Charmaine both felt that they had done everything right and put their faith in the system. The detailing of their lives before the economic collapse show that the couple had all the fixtures of this white picket fence fantasy – a beautiful, happy couple in a home of matching furniture, decorative pillows, and curtains waiting for the arrival of a baby in the spare bedroom of the home. Charmaine is, perhaps, the most faithful believer in some unattainable American Dream – something that has seemingly always been fundamentally unreal and utopic – constantly remarking that despite their shortcomings, at

least they have each other and that “most people are good underneath if they have a chance to show their goodness,” (4). While Charmaine internally questions the point of her life and falls into nihilistic thought patterns, she does her best to remain an optimistic force in Stan’s life with her cheery demeanor and constant insistence that everything will turn out okay for them in the end, locked in their own unequal pairing, similar to the dual relationship of Consilience and Positron. Charmaine’s insistence seems to have an opposite effect on Stan, as he is constantly reminded of his inability to provide for her and a constant worry that he will not be able to protect her. Where Charmaine is cheerful and optimistic, Stan seems pessimistic and doubtful that their luck will turn.

The relationship between Charmaine and Stan is complicated by the loss of tradition both of them seem tied to, as there are no longer any clear, gendered roles for them to play – a once-stable binary that has collapsed. While Stan wants to play the role of protector and provider, it is Charmaine’s savings that allowed them to flee their home and her job as a bartender that provides the couple just enough money for food and gas. While Charmaine works, Stan waits for her, driving the car around to avoid looters. Though Stan constantly applies for jobs, he is usually overqualified or there is not much work for middle-of-the-road people like himself, where service industry jobs would be since there aren’t many people left to serve. This leaves Stan in a traditionally feminine role – staying at “home” while Charmaine does the work to provide for them – and leaving both Stan and Charmaine harboring resentment for one another, despite clinging to this antiquated notion that everything will turn out fine as long as they have each other.

This resentment coupled with their constant presence in each other’s lives characterizes their relationship as seemingly lonely and empty, as Charmaine and Stan

fail to communicate their feelings to one another and address their resentments. The loss of their home and exile to their car queers the identities of both Charmaine and Stan – two people who clung to an American Dream that no longer exists, but still feel that there is a way to gain back what they lost. Their interactions and reliance on each other are born out of necessity rather than love, as Charmaine feels a duty to reassure Stan that they can return to their old lives and Stan tries to assume the role of protector to Charmaine. Their relationship is based on a shallow type of love where neither character can elaborate on the reasons why they love one another, while each long for the identity they previously had – with Stan as protector and provider and Charmaine as a homemaker, patiently awaiting a time she could become a mother. Their relationship perpetuates this crisis state, as they are both constantly trying to ensure the others' happiness while sacrificing their own. As their priorities shift to simply surviving rather than creating a life of comfort, their relationship further queers their identities, stripping them of their own pursuits of happiness and perpetuating their own suffering in their crisis state.

At the beginning stages of the novel, the most heterotopic space is the car, which works as almost a counter-space to the house. The car becomes this sort of diminished reality of their once stable, middle-class home. It is a private space, but much more vulnerable and permeable, with not much security or privacy. The car provides a sort of social status, as a commodity that others of the somehow lower classes vie, and even kill, for. Charmaine notes that though her and Stan fear for their lives, what the nighttime thieves really want “would be the truly valuable thing, which was the car...” and that there had been “a number of former car owners flung out onto the gravel ... knifed, heads

crushed in, bleeding to death” (12-13). As Charmaine and Stan are clearly in a crisis state, the car is representative of a crisis heterotopia – a “privilege ... or forbidden place,” as Foucault notes in his lecture (24), that the nighttime thugs are unable to access. The idea of allowing special permissions to enter these spaces is a queered notion in itself in this Midwest wasteland that Charmaine and Stan are inhabiting, as no person would permit any entrance into that space lest they sacrifice their safety. The car has a clearly defined function in Stan and Charmaine’s life, ultimately being protection and home, rather than for transportation needs – a contradictory space that is not valued for its ability to take them places, but instead as a poor substitute of a house.

The heterotopic space of the car allows for the couple to have some clearly defined roles, as it acts almost as a queered version of a household with an unwillingly queer couple as householders. The couple spend most of the time in the car separated by the front and back seat with Stan occupying the role of driver and sitting in the front seat and Charmaine occupying the backseat. While Charmaine remarks that the backseat is bigger, Stan occupies the front seat so that he can quickly awake and drive the car should there be an emergency. Charmaine occupies the backseat because neither of them trust her to be alert enough to drive them to safety in an emergency situation. While these roles are limited, their lives do not have much purpose beyond survival, another example of together-but-separate and adjacent, rather than truly united.

Like the space in *Midsommar*, the geography is intentionally confused, since the reader has no idea where Stan and Charmaine park their car from day to day and there are no clear landmarks that establish them in one space, as the car is not valuable for transportation so much as it is a model of the home. This confused geography of the car,

though, is ultimately what works to protect Stan and Charmaine best, as they have the ability to flee from dangerous situations they may encounter. Atwood carefully mentions throughout the novel that the story takes place in the Midwest but fails to elaborate exactly where in the Midwest. From the starting point of the novel to the space in the car, the heterotopic elements of their geography shield them from bandits looking to steal the car and the creditors who sought to foreclose on their home. With this comes a false sense of freedom, however, the couple are ostracized from society, only heightening their states of crisis as they long to return to some sort of normalcy.

The desperation Charmaine and Stan feel to leave this heterotopic space and return to “normalcy” influences their decision to apply for the Positron Project in the town of Consilience, a seemingly utopian solution for a dystopian world, offering a facsimile of the American middle-class life. As capitalism has failed in this speculative version of the United States, the solution seems to be some sort of system separate from capitalism with a form of communal living. When Charmaine sees the ad while working a bartending shift, the space shown on screen appears to be a utopia in comparison to the car, appealing to the deepest senses of desire in Charmaine – one that models the American Dream that her and Stan used to have. The advertisement carefully shows couples just like Stan and Charmaine smiling in bright colors on manicured lawns in front of freshly painted houses before showing the inside of the house with a king-sized bed, a spacious bathroom, and a clean, open kitchen, stating “remember what your life used to be like? Before the dependable world we used to know was disrupted?” (25).

Though Charmaine and Stan feel that their situation is unique to them, their identity is easily recognized – and manipulated – by the heterotopic site of Consilience /

Positron, the experimental twin city that holds both the prison site and the town. The targeted words of the advertisement and their slogan of “a meaningful life” strike a chord with Stan and Charmaine, whose lives currently have no purpose beyond survival. While the Consilience/Positron model would require Stan and Charmaine to have dual identities as prisoner and citizen alternating each month, the proposition seems appealing given the sense of security, something that they both know the space of the car cannot provide long-term. Even a part-time identity of “prisoner” would be preferable to the queered state of full-time prisoners in the car, which easily influences the couple’s decision when offered a position in the Consilience model. The Consilience model guarantees full-employment and a “home,” whether they are civilians or prisoners. The twin city is, thus, self-sustaining, receiving employment from keeping the prison and town running through the labor of the prisoners and the civilians’ interdependent relationship.

Like the geography of the car, the geography of the Consilience prison is similarly confused, making it unreachable by those who do not have the proper permissions to enter, which in many ways is also extended to the reader. In order for Stan and Charmaine to get to Consilience, the prison company sends a bus to bring them to the site. The trip lasts for hours, travelling through the “open countryside, past strip malls with plywood over most of the windows, derelict burger joints ... only the gas stations appear functional” (31). This small insight provided by Atwood shows the extent of the economical hurt suffered by the region, but also further works to show Stan and Charmaine how far the decayed system has spread – making Consilience seem like the light at the end of the tunnel. When the couple arrive at Consilience for the first time, there is not much explanation of how the site is separated from the wasteland that

surrounds it aside from a seeing-eye boundary along the wall where the prospective prisoners' fingerprints are taken, and they are given proper identification.

As the Consilience project is highly selective of their participants, the participants are subjected to something similar to an audition where the evaluators decide who stays and goes based on a limited understanding of their queered identities. While all the people who come to Consilience share a common identity with Stan and Charmaine – one that is solely focused on survival – the managers of the project are looking for a specific type of identity who are willing to contribute to the overall productivity of the town and be good, law-abiding citizens – and more than willing to deny anyone who does not meet their criteria, including dismissing those who they do not feel meet the aesthetic needs of the community. Stan and Charmaine are not privy to the criteria for this evaluation, nor is the reader, but the controversial nature of the project hints that the participants they are looking for are those who are submissive and unquestioning. When Stan and Charmaine are selected for the project, Consilience grants them one night outside of the wall, spent in a nasty motel after their night of luxury inside. Presumably, this is to influence potential members by reminding them that submitting and assuming the identity of part-time prisoner is preferable to life outside of the Consilience, one that would force them to live in a continued crisis state.

Stan and Charmaine initially see Consilience as a realized utopia – a real house, added meaning and purpose to their lives, stability, safety, and a clear identity. While Consilience appears to be a last choice for Stan and Charmaine, it almost appears as a dream to them despite their desperation, with the stability the real world could not provide. When they arrive from the bus, they are lured into the ambience of the place and

treated with a kindness they had not experienced in the ruthless dystopia outside of Consilience's walls, as well as well-prepared food, service, and a hotel bed where they can stretch out beside each other. Consilience seems an idyllic escape from poverty for Stan and Charmaine, offering them new opportunities and all the things they longed for on the outside. For a year, the place seems like a utopia to them and the use of a one-year time jump suggests that Stan and Charmaine that Consilience is a utopia.

Foucault writes that utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces, though "they present society itself in a perfected form" (24). Consilience initially appears as society in its most perfected form – a place where there is full employment, purpose, security, stability, and equality amongst all its residents. Though it presents itself initially as a utopia, any place that presents itself as such cannot exist in society and is therefore classified as a heterotopia – as this place that is "a sort of mixed, joint experience" (24). This mixed, joint experience certainly applies to Consilience, as it does offer an escape for poverty and safety for many of its members, though it is inherently heterotopic in the requirements of its residents in the exchange for this protection. This exchange is conditional though, and like heterotopias, individuals joining the project have to submit to certain rites and rituals to gain access. In the case of Consilience, this takes the form of a contract that lasts their entire lives – whether that comes naturally or at the hands of the Consilience management. Through both their admission and contract termination process, Consilience has power over those who inhabit the space by virtue of deciding who lives and dies. Though the members of Consilience, like Stan and Charmaine, are unaware of this power and are all too happy to perform their roles in exchange for their safety and protection. Though Consilience is presented to them as middle class America where they

would have jobs and security, it eventually becomes clear over the course of the novel that the site they have entered is not ruled by capitalism, democracy, or communism, but rather a sort of serfdom where the people live and die at the whim of the owners.

Stan and Charmaine's identities shift from a queered couple living in a crisis state to queered individuals performing specific identities as assigned to them by the management of Consilience. While Consilience offers the trappings of a middle-class, American life, Consilience is very clearly not that. The identities they assume once inside the project are reflective of heterotopias of deviation, as Foucault notes in his theory as "those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed," the state that typically occurs after the crisis state (25). As the nature of the Consilience project requires rotating identities of "civilian" and "prisoner" each month as part of their contract, Stan and Charmaine's identities are queered no matter what stage of the cycle they are in, constantly existing outside of some norm persisted by Consilience and the rest of society, which they remain ostracized from. Foucault notes that prisons are one of the most easily recognized heterotopias of deviation, as prisoners' identities are deviant to civilians' outside of the walls of a prison campus, but Stan and Charmaine complicate this notion by the voluntary nature of their sentences. These identities can still be classified as deviant though precisely because of this voluntary nature of their sentences. In a space where the people appear to have illusion of choice when it comes to survival, the only option for survival is willingly submitting freedom for safety and security.

The confused geography the twin city of Consilience continues even after Stan and Charmaine have been invited into the site, and the two do little to reveal the aspects

of the heterotopic site. As described by the CEO of Consilience, Ed, the project is best understood as an egg: “Consilience is the white, Positron is a yolk, and together they make the whole egg” (42). The town surrounded by walls to keep everyone in the town, almost as if the civilians are prisoners even when not in prison. Though, this time spent in the Positron prison with Charmaine and Stan is mostly glossed over by the two, as well as the time spent in their home, leaving little detail about the geography of Consilience. The little that is described to the reader reveals that the Positron prison was a pre-existing prison, called The Upstate Correctional Institute, that served a previous prison population. The prison cells have been upgraded to maintain a quality consistent with the rest of Consilience, including food of “at least three-star quality” (43). As for their home, Stan and Charmaine receive all the fixtures of the life they had before – a beautiful, newly-renovated home with a huge, manicured lawn all curated to a theme consistent with the 1950s, “because that was the decade in which the most people had self-identified as being happy” and happiness is one of the project’s main goals (41). The distance between the sites of the prison and Stan and Charmaine’s shared home, though, is unclear to the reader and never revealed throughout the novel, as if the lack of clearly-defined space between the prison system and the home in Consilience blurs the identities of the members of the program and constitutes the entire space as a “prison.” The wall around Consilience that forbids the exit of prisoners and civilians, further blurs their identities and dissolves this binary, as both terms are stripped of their meanings. Even though these terms seem to be stripped of their meanings, Stan and Charmaine’s actual bodies are still controlled and subject to Consilience’s decisions.

As happy members of the project, Stan and Charmaine willingly submit to their assigned roles and do not question the order or the operations of the town. They seem unbothered by the duality of their civilian/prisoner identities, seeming to prefer these identities over the living in a constant state of crisis as they did prior to arriving in Consilience, complicating traditionally held understandings of “prison.” While life on the “outside” in the town of Consilience is far more desirable than life “inside” the Positron prison, the aspects of their lives in the town of Consilience are heavily controlled and structured similarly. Like Positron, everybody has a job assigned to them, their homes act as larger cells, the media they consume is heavily controlled, and though they have the option to cook the food they want, there is still some element of control regarding what comes in and out of Consilience’s walls. The town of Consilience, however, represents a prison on a much larger scale – the people are free to move around as they please, as long as it is within the town’s walls and their day to day actions have some sort of control, granting the mere illusion of freedom to its members.

The lack of detail of the space as told to the reader by Stan and Charmaine seems deliberate, as they are too happy in these newly-assigned identities to reveal much logistic information about the heterotopic site of Consilience. Stan works as a scooter repairman when he is a civilian and tends to the chicken wing of the Positron prison as a prisoner, while Charmaine works as the chief medications administer as a prisoner and in a bakery as a civilian. The couple seemingly find fulfillment through their contributions to Consilience, though their relationship begins to fail, and their identities begin to shift away from each other as they are no longer dependent upon one another for survival.

With their identities becoming independent from each other, the two begin to fantasize about their Alternates, the people who occupy their home when Stan and Charmaine spend the month in the Positron prison, showing their longing for some other identification beyond their own relationship. The idea of double is a motif frequently used in literature and utilized by Atwood in the novel to show an embodiment of specific characteristics that Stan and Charmaine desire to have in themselves and in a partner. Though the couples would seemingly identify with the Alternate that is of the same sex, Stan and Charmaine seek to fulfill the missing pieces of their relationship with their Alternates. For Charmaine, this takes the form of “Max,” who brings out to her a more promiscuous, careless side of her through an intense, physical relationship that happens once a month on changeover day. Stan’s Alternate is “Jasmine,” a “slut, that Jasmine. Flaming hot in an instant, like an induction cooker” and the opposite of Charmaine, who he married as an “escape from the many-layered, devious, ironic, hot-cold women” like “Jasmine” (48). Stan’s relationship to Jasmine, however, is merely fantasy – a dream he clings to get him through the days in Consilience.

The relationships Stan and Charmaine begin with their alternates further complicates their marriage as well as complicating the heterotopic space of Consilience, corrupting their identities entirely. While Consilience markets its ultimate goal of happiness for its members, the relationships Stan and Charmaine share with their Alternates prove that the goal is really control. “Max” and “Jasmine” reveal themselves to be Phil and Jocelyn, with the latter controlling all three of them through her position in surveillance. Jocelyn admits to being one of the founding members of the project but felt that the current model has slipped from the original vision of the project. Though the

project was initially created to “rejuvenate the rust belt and create jobs,” Jocelyn remarks that “once you’ve got a controlled population with a wall around it and no oversight, you can do anything you want. You start to see the possibilities. And some of those got very profitable, very fast” (126). Jocelyn shares this information with Stan, but only as a means for control, as she intends to use him to get a message outside and to help fix the Consilience to reflect the former vision. Charmaine, on the other hand, was specifically targeted in order to create a motive for wanting to eliminate Stan and that she would be susceptible to Phil’s seduction.

The revelations from Jocelyn revealing the true intentions of Consilience further queer the space, as it is not the idyllic escape from poverty that Charmaine and Stan signed up for and that Consilience was a queered, heterotopic space long before Stan and Charmaine. The site of Consilience begins to transform in their minds, as they no longer view it as utopia and begin to perceive Consilience for the manipulative institution it is. Though Stan and Charmaine initially were happy and entered a heterotopia of deviation as they left their crisis states after their acceptance to Consilience, the awareness of Consilience’s true goals puts them in danger once again, forcing them into new crisis states that have them trying to survive at the hands of a corporate monster. Jocelyn reveals that the real business the project does is from the prison, with the income coming from body parts – “organs, bones, DNA, whatever’s in demand” – for aging millionaires, with the body parts coming from “undesirables” from the outside and within the prison (127). Those characterized as “undesirable” were prisoners who lived in the penitentiary prior to the opening of Consilience, but after running out of those people, the “undesirables” became anybody the CEO, Ed, deems as such. Though the members of

Consilience are not aware of this prospect, it is a means for control beyond imprisonment. In a society where imprisonment is escape from poverty, murder for the purpose of organ harvesting becomes the new punishment for deviant behavior.

As well as the organ harvesting, Consilience experiments with brain procedures that queer the identity of the recipient and explore themes of mental imprisonments. This brain operation can be administered to anyone, though against a person's consent and at the will of whoever purchased their body. Described by one of the characters, Budge, as "choos[ing] a babe, give her the operation, stick yourself in front of her when she's waking up, and she's yours forever, always compliant, always ready, no matter what you do" (204). The procedure acts as a type of mental imprisonment, as the procedure is permanent and inescapable for whoever it is administered to, though there is no resistance or awareness of the procedure after it is done. This procedure further expands Consilience's hold on its members, as the brain alterations are the most severe method of control employed by the company.

As members of Consilience's prison population are all inherently equal with no one prisoner having more wealth than the other, the brain operations and organ harvesting are largely purchased by wealthy outsiders who have a stake in the company. This point, though largely unexplored by Atwood in the novel, shows the extent to which Consilience has a hold over its members' physical bodies. These queered bodies, with no other options, submitted the rights to their life over to a corporation in exchange for protection. Rather than offering them protection, Consilience solicits their bodies to the highest bidders, showing an extreme abuse of power and subjecting its members

unwittingly to crisis states by having them fight for survival, similar to life outside of Consilience's walls.

The final chapters of the book are absurdist and almost satirical in nature, highlighting the absurdity of the characters' choices throughout the novel. In order for the information about Consilience to leak to the public, Jocelyn must sneak Stan out of the prison by convincing management that he has been killed. As Chief Medications Administer, this responsibility falls on Charmaine, who is asked to prove her loyalty to Consilience by administering life-ending drugs to Stan, which she mournfully does. Throughout the novel, Charmaine gives a glimpse into her job as Chief Medications Administer, where she gives a "special procedure" to patients that ultimately kills them, though she has no connection or knowledge of the patient before or after the procedure. The patients who receive Charmaine's "special procedure" are presumably those deemed by the CEO or administration as being "undesirable" and being used for their bodies and parts. When Charmaine is asked to administer the procedure to Stan, she assumes that Stan has committed some atrocity to warrant his position there and does not question or hesitate to follow through with the procedure. Though the drug only gives the impression that Charmaine has killed Stan, leaving Charmaine stranded in Consilience with the sense that Stan is dead. Stan, on the other hand, escapes Consilience as a messenger for Jocelyn and works in Las Vegas as an Elvis impersonator for hire, living in a space with dozens of other Elvis impersonators while he waits to pass along the information about Consilience's side business. The two live separately for an undetermined time until Charmaine is taken out of the prison by the Consilience CEO, Ed, who has hired her as his assistant and plans to have the brain operation administered to her in Las Vegas. The

final pages of the book reveal a seemingly happy ending for everyone, as Charmaine is given the brain operation and becomes hopelessly in love with Stan, reviving their relationship.

Though it is unclear why Atwood deconstructs these notions of prisons throughout the book, it seems that it is best explored as a study into creating and maintaining stable identities within structures like neo-liberal capitalist nation-states. Atwood's exploration of voluntary imprisonment, then, works as an allegory for the prison of capitalism, a particularly exploitative economic system. When an identity is tied up in things and the continuous pursuit of upward mobility, then the identity is vulnerable to becoming a thing to the corporation – an item to accumulate, causing some loss of identity as a “person.” That identity then switches from “person” to “worker,” or a person to exploit for their labor. This very idea happens to Stan and Charmaine, whose identities are more tied up in the things around them than their relationship. After being admitted, it is clear that Charmaine, especially, is tied up in the notions of consumerism, as Stan remarks that “he wishes he were the object of excitement, and not the dishwasher, which she's now cooing over as if it's a kitten” and her emotion over the loss of their “newly bought home and their newly bought sofa with the flowered throw pillows that Charmaine had taken such trouble to match” (8, 44).

The nature of capitalism suggests that in order to have an identity of value, or meaning, there must be some contribution to the system – hence Consilience's motto of “a meaningful life.” The characters in the texts, *Midsommar* and *The Heart Goes Last*, wrestle with these identities, albeit in different ways. *Midsommar* is set in a commune where everyone is equal and has different roles to contribute to the success of the village.

The American characters, though, have an individualized identity and have trouble letting go of these identities, though this is part of what makes Dani different, as she is able to become enmeshed in the community. Similarly, Stan and Charmaine become enmeshed in the institution and the false sense of community offered to them by Consilience, though Consilience simply sees them as bodies they can exploit, even unto death and dismemberment. While Stan and Charmaine enter a system seemingly representative of communal living, the quest for profit margins far outweigh the value of community.

Though there is this notion held by Stan and Charmaine that they are contributing to a better society, it is self-serving, as they cling to the idea that their identities are more valuable than those around them. The selfish nature of their identities is one shared by all the characters throughout the book and emphasized by Atwood's happy ending for Stan and Charmaine, though Consilience continues to exist in a modified form even after the scandalous information is released. The sense of ruthless individualism prevails in the final pages of the novel, as well, seeping into the lives of the former Consilience members long after their release. Rather than leaking the information about the dark information about Consilience's true business for humanitarian purposes, Lucinda Quant releases the information as a sort of comeback for her lost reality television career – a ruthless self-serving endeavor meant to make her more money that just so happened to save lives. Lucinda's interest in her own satisfaction is further exemplified when Ed, the former CEO and orchestrator of Consilience's dark market, is given the brain operation to imprint on Lucinda. Jocelyn, the other founder of Consilience, ensures that Ed goes free rather than testifying to Congress and revealing herself as somewhat of an accomplice to the human rights violations of Consilience.

Atwood seems to critique American individualism throughout the novel, as the characters are repeatedly offered the opportunity to trade freedom, liberty, and choice for security, comfort and ease. Though Stan and Charmaine have freedom on the outside of Consilience, their choice to enter Consilience is representative of their preference for security and comfort, rather than freedom and choice. Charmaine remarks on this at the end of the novel after she has had the brain operation to imprint on Stan, stating that things have been easier since the operation and that “the dark part of herself that was with her for so long seems to be completely gone” (363). Along with improving her relationship with Stan, the operation alleviates the pain of the things she had done in Consilience and some sense of responsibility for her actions, including her affair and the procedures she had done as Medications Administrator. When Jocelyn reveals to Charmaine at the end of the novel that she did not actually have the brain procedure, Charmaine contemplates her ability to choose, burdened with the idea having a choice when it could lead to her unhappiness. Though Jocelyn questions Charmaine by asking her “Isn’t it better to do something you’ve decided to? Rather than because you have to?,” Charmaine’s decision is never revealed and she descends into a crisis state, plagued by indecision over her commitment to Stan.

Jocelyn’s “wedding gift” to Charmaine queer her and enters her into a crisis state where she is burdened by her freedom to choose. While the life she has lived with Stan for the past year in their home is representative of the one she longed for in the beginning of the novel, this space unravels with this new information. The emphasis on the private, secure, and well-appointed space of the middle-class home is persistent throughout the novel, but in the end, the home her and Stan created has become heterotopic and queered

by the false sense of security both have in their relationship. As the idea of the home seemed utopic in the early stages of the novel, the final pages of the book suggest that it no longer exists in the way that Stan and Charmaine imagined it when they finally have it. Though Charmaine is “more free, but less secure” by hearing this information, the burden of choice perpetuates a crisis state that she will be unable to leave unless she makes a decision to stay with Stan – a life of comfort, security, and ease – or pursue something separate from their relationship – liberty, freedom, and choice – at the risk of her own happiness. Charmaine’s relationship with Stan is representative of the questions posed throughout the novel. While the brain adjustment has offered Charmaine comfort, it is at the sacrifice of her freedom – making Stan a mirror of Consilience. Though Charmaine is protected from the risks associated with freedom and liberty, it is at the sake of her own imprisonment and continued desire for some great unknown. The open ending suggests that the reader is meant to consider the implications of Charmaine and Stan’s queered relationships and the idea that there are no non-heterotopic spaces wherever they are.

CONCLUSION

Since there is a lot left to be desired in the theory, the study of *Midsommar* and *The Heart Goes Last* is mostly analyzed through a “heterotopic lens” that allows for flexibility within the framework of the theory but seeks to understand the meanings of these texts in our present moment more so than the theory itself. Concepts and themes present in both *Midsommar* and *The Heart Goes Last* are becoming more prevalent in contemporary popular culture, and interrogations into these specific texts through a heterotopic lens can guide our understanding of our current moment and explore personal heterotopias that influencing media. Foucault’s theory leaves much to be desired but allows for inquiries about identities and their relationship to the spaces they inhabit. It seems the most apt application of Foucault’s heterotopias first examines the queer identities of individuals, as if queered bodies are the agents that queer a space, and then some examination of how the space is queered or heterotopic. With this framework in mind, further expansion and application of this theory may necessitate some further understanding of what it means to have a queer identity or body, beyond the limitations of sexual identity.

The conversation surrounding queered identities and heterotopias is especially relevant today as there seems to be some widespread, universal acknowledgement and awareness of the self and our relationship to the spaces we inhabit. This is particularly true as we come to interrogate the nature of space in self-imposed quarantine and the deconstruction of boundaries in our personal spaces. Particularly in our current moment, the pandemic has led us to a questioning of the spaces we inhabit on a larger scale and the institutions that oversee these spaces. In the United States, our identities have become

particularly queered, as we descend into crisis states triggered by the huge spike in unemployment and our government's inability to protect our health and financial well-being. Many have questioned our relationship to these systems as we watch countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, and South Korea work to stop the spread of disease by paying citizens to stay home and offering additional financial assistance to essential workers, while our president suggests we should be willing to die for the sake of the economy. The current crisis has led to this interrogation of many systems that seem to be at the core of American identities, including the feasibility of capitalism in times of crisis and whether or not a free market offers citizens freedom. Like the characters in the two texts being analyzed, everyone is being subjected to the most extreme states of crisis that will certainly have political and economic implications for decades to come, undoubtedly queering the nation.

Though Foucault never fully developed heterotopias into a coherent and finalized theory, there are still scholars attempting to understand and apply his theory to their own work. Foucault's theory has been applied in academic scholarship in a variety of subjects, including sociological geography, political states, as well as literature, film, and television, with a growing reinterest in the theory within the past five years. Much of the recent scholarship on heterotopias in recent years has trended towards understanding and analyzing heterotopias through film and literature, with recent works studying heterotopias in the anthology television show *Black Mirror*, David Lynch's 1990 television show *Twin Peaks*, and Sylvia Plath's 1963 novel *The Bell Jar*, to cite a few. Of these publications, the theory is employed in a way that examines the different principles

of heterotopias, specifically examining the mirror noted by Foucault and addressing “placeless places” in their primary texts.

As limitations to the scope of the theory applied in this project, future application of the theory has two key issues to address, including addressing what exactly constitutes a “queered” identity and some understanding of to what extent a queered body or identity queers a space. As for queer identities, there seems to exist some notion of what a queer identity is outside of sexual identity, but it can be entirely subjective and needs further analysis to articulate what exactly qualifies a character as “queer.” As with individuals identifying as LGBTQ, there are notions of having been queer since birth with realization coming later in life, perhaps during sexual maturity. With this understanding in mind, it could rightfully be assumed that these identities had the capability to be queer since birth but were triggered by a single moment that rendered them “queered.” In the two texts explored in this project, Dani, Charmaine and Stan were queered because of crisis states that were triggered by monumental life events. For Dani, her crisis state was one reflected of grief and mourning for her sister and parents’ lives, while Stan and Charmaine’s crisis states were influenced by their need to survive and find some sense of middle-class normalcy. The examples in *Midsommar* and *The Heart Goes Last* seem to be two extreme examples of this queered identity, but further exploration into this notion of queering of identity may suggest that no extreme event needs to take place to queer a character.

While understanding what qualifies a queer identity, it is also necessary to understand to what extent a queered body could queer a space. Hårga and Consilience were queered spaces long before the entrance of Dani, Stan, and Charmaine, but to what

extent were these spaces already queered? Hårga's long history celebrating the midsummer festival and sacrificing human bodies for the prosperity of the village had occurred for several centuries prior to Dani's arrival, perpetuating this queered cycle and establishing itself as a queered geography. While Consilience does not have a centuries-long history, the intentions of the project made Consilience queered since its creation, as the site was meant to be a facsimile of prisons and a middle-class-like town and the entrance of Stan and Charmaine queered the space while also helping to revealing the true motivations behind the project.

Michel Foucault's theory on heterotopias seems more amenable to certain genres, specifically speculative fiction and subgenres of speculative fiction, as they typically involve characters who are on some level already queered and existing or travelling to spaces that are heterotopic. Horror as a subgenre of speculative of fiction, more specifically, in both film and literature have conventions and themes that resonate with the principles of heterotopias in Foucault's theory. As horror is meant to evoke feelings of fear, the use of queer characters and exploration of the "other" is one of the most identifiable conventions of the genre. Many sites explored in horror resonate with spaces outlined by Foucault, including the asylum, cemeteries, and other sites like the haunted house alluded to by Foucault in "Of Other Spaces" that are certainly queered spaces.

Horror as a genre has always had some sort of social conscience while grappling with human's most primal emotion of fear, particularly fear of the unknown, making analysis through a heterotopic lens particularly useful. Horror movies typically depict characters who are already queered, as either the protagonist is queered by the events before the film or early on and the presence of a horrific character can alter a space into a

queered, heterotopic space. The moment a horror antagonist enters a space, it is transformed by virtue of their presence – more specifically referencing Michael Myers of the *Halloween* franchise entrance into Haddonfield, Pennywise’s arrival to Derry, Maine in Stephen King’s *It*, or Freddie Krueger’s appearance in a nightmare, a “placeless place” in its own right, further queered by the character.

Along with classic horror characters and stories, horror as a genre has seen a shifting in conventions that would make it a worthy study through heterotopias in an expansion of this project. Along with Ari Aster, director of *Midsommar*, directors like Jordan Peele have focused the genre on queered characters and spaces in their own horror films, offering commentary on contemporary society while creating a fictionalized space. Peele’s 2017 film *Get Out* and 2019 film *Us* seem to be ripe with opportunity for analysis of queered characters and spaces. *Get Out* could offer a more critical analysis of the “placeless place” and imagined space through his creation of the “sunken place” and the idea of placing a white person’s brain/identity into a black person’s body, challenging Foucault’s theory with a particular focus on the queer body and identity. With its obvious social commentary and connections to present-day racial relations in the United States, a heterotopic analysis of Peele’s directorial debut could work to understand the current racial climate of the country while deconstructing our ideas of space and identity. Peele’s second film, *Us*, seems to have the most obvious example of queered bodies and selves, as the film explores a present-day America where alternate versions of ourselves, named the “tethered,” revolt against their human counterparts. The sites explored in the film are also representative of heterotopias, as the tunnels inhabited by the tethered are reserved only for them, and it is not freely accessible by those above their tunnels. The tethered

signify some sort of embodied queered, insisting that there is an inherent queerness of everybody, and understanding identity and queerness would be a worthy study in tandem with Peele's film. The film explores these queered sites and the contradictory nature of our spaces, and further exploration of heterotopias in horror movies through Peele's films would prove to illuminate unexplored aspects of heterotopias through this project.

Aside from speculative genres, Southern gothic is a genre that is also seemingly amenable to criticism through a heterotopic lens. As a regional genre of literature, texts in the Southern gothic genre explore themes of race, place, and past, particularly focusing on repressed and neglected spaces and people with concepts of queer identities, often being characterized as "grotesque." A study into a Southern gothic text through a heterotopic lens would take a similar methodology as chapter 2, with an analysis of the history of the space and its people necessary to understand the queered identities of characters in their present texts. Hårga was queered by its people and then Hårga, through its history and traditions, continues a cycle of queering and being queered by the people that inhabit the space. Similarly, the American south continues this tradition and further studies of the genre would require methodology similar to this project. As Foucault notes in "Of Other Spaces," the great obsession of during the time of his talk was history, making Southern Gothic a perfect genre for a heterotopic analysis.

As a regional subgenre, Southern gothic texts are not widely published, but there are a few notable works that provide great understandings of heterotopias, including texts by Carson McCullers and Truman Capote. The queer and the grotesque are themes often explored through the Southern gothic genre and texts by the authors previously mentioned include man characters attributing these features. Carson McCullers' novel

frequently utilized “freaks” throughout her novels: dwarves, giants, “cross-dressers,” homosexuals, and deaf-mutes. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* contains several queered characters, all of whom share point of view chapters and confide in a deaf-mute character. The house that the deaf-mute inhabits becomes a heterotopia by the repeated visits these differently queered characters make to visit and speak with the deaf-mute, requiring special permissions to enter, and becoming a heterotopia that the characters seek out as a haven from the world. Similarly, Truman Capote’s 1948 novel *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, explores a site in-depth that hosts several queered characters, including Joel, a lonely, effeminate boy coming of age, in a decaying mansion on a plantation in Skully’s Landing, Mississippi, exploring his own queered identity while grappling with his relationship to those around him, including his father, who is a mute paraplegic, his stepmother’s homosexual cousin, and a tomboyish girl named Idabel. The decaying mansion on the plantation is reminiscent of the South’s troubled relationship with its history and the lingering ghost of a once-great region left with the only memory of their greatness, making sites and characters of the heterotopic South in a unique crisis state.

With the suggested expansions to the theory and key texts to analyze through a heterotopic lens, it is likely that the work started through this project, much like Foucault’s theory, is not complete. Understanding and developing a methodology for employing Foucault’s theory seems merely the beginning of this application. The interpretation of the theory proposed throughout this project certainly expands Foucault’s theory and offers worthy points of analysis for future scholars interested in studying heterotopias through a queer theoretical lens.

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