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## Dark Tourism, Heterotopias and Post-Apocalyptic Places: The Case of Chernobyl

*Philip R. Stone*

### **Introduction**

On 26 April 1986, during a procedural shut down of reactor number four at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (now Ukraine), a catastrophic surge of energy led to a vessel rupture and, subsequently, resulted in the world's worst nuclear accident. The reported numbers of deaths from the disaster vary enormously, including from the radioactive fallout that encroached great swathes of northern Europe, to the apparent generational health maladies that now affect local populations. Nevertheless, despite obvious health and safety concerns, illegal tourism to Chernobyl has flourished over the past decade or so. In 2011 – the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disaster – the Ukrainian government sanctioned official tours to the site, as well as to the nearby abandoned 'ghost-town' of Pripyat.

Arguably, therefore, Chernobyl has become a destination associated with dark tourism and the 'darker side of travel' (Sharpley and Stone, 2009; Stone, 2011). The purpose of this chapter is to critically explore the touristification of Chernobyl and, in particular, examine how a place of industrial disaster can convey broader political narratives and identity. Indeed, Chernobyl is a monument to the secrecy and failings of the Cold War, a warning from history of a nuclear-energy utopia, and a place located within the 'badlands of modernity' that can provide a surreal counter-hegemonic representation of space (Hetherington, 1997). Chernobyl and the exclusion zone around it is where the technologies and disciplines of social orders are

out of sequence and suspended with globalisation and a new world order; a place misaligned with respect to normal or everyday space. It is also a place which is now consumed as a tourist experience which, in turn, allows for a potential re-sequencing and re-construction of the past, creating a new space where microcosms of society are perceived. Thus, Chernobyl as a space of technical, political and cultural importance allows, through its touristic production and consumption, for a valorisation of an alternate social ordering. In so doing, Chernobyl is viewed as a heterotopia – a ritual space that exists outside of time – in which time is not only arrested but also notions of Otherness are consumed in a post-apocalyptic place.

However, questions remain as to how Chernobyl can be framed as a psychogeographical space. Particularly, how is Chernobyl perceived as Other? What are the potential roles of dark tourism and the rituals of the tourist experience in co-constructing the place? Moreover, does Chernobyl provide a blueprint of how other ‘dark tourism’ sites might be constructed as marginal spaces? Through the application of Foucault’s diverse, if not contested, concept of heterotopia, this chapter critically examines Chernobyl and its commodification within a conceptual heterotopian framework. In short, the research outlines Foucault’s principles of heterotopias and, subsequently, offers an exploratory synthesis with tourism at Chernobyl. Ultimately, by examining Chernobyl as a heterotopia, the study suggests the popularising of Chernobyl through dark tourism means the politics of the past are interfaced with the present, and that utopian ideals of the former Soviet Union are exposed within the petrified ruins of a heterotopian place. The first task, however, is to briefly locate the concept of heterotopia within broader social theory before reviewing Chernobyl and its subsequent touristification into an-Other place.

### **Chernobyl as Heterotopia: ‘The Other Place’**

In 1966, during a French radio interview on ‘Les Hétérotopies’, the renowned philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault adopted the tone of an old traveller telling children amusing tales about the marvellous places he had visited. Subsequently, during an architectural lecture the following year, Foucault introduced the perplexing term ‘heterotopia’ to describe an assortment of places and institutions that interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space (Foucault, 1967 [1984]). Foucault suggested ‘heterotopias’ – as opposed to ‘utopias’ as invented places – are real spaces where the

boundaries of normalcy within society are transgressed. Literally meaning ‘of Other Places’, Foucault argued that heterotopias inject a sense of alterity into the sameness, and where change enters the familiar and difference is inserted into the commonplace. Indeed, heterotopias are spaces of contradiction and duality, as well as places of physical representation and imagined meaning. Foucault used a broad array of everyday examples and places to illustrate his heterotopian idea, including the school, military service, the honeymoon, old people’s homes, psychiatric institutions, prisons, cemeteries, theatres and cinemas, libraries and museums, fairs and carnivals, holiday camps, saunas, brothels, motels, the Jesuit colonies, and the ship. In short, however, heterotopias may be broadly defined as real places, but which are perceived to stand outside of known space and, thus, create a sense of the alternative. Since Foucault’s original conception, scholars have used the term heterotopia somewhat loosely as they pursue a direct connection with the topic of their study of public-private spaces within a ‘post-civil society’ (Dehaene and De Cauter, 2008). Given such an array of examples, it is easy to understand, perhaps, the vastness of the concept, as well as its contention. Nonetheless, and stripped of its philosophical verbiage, the notion of heterotopias as alternative social spaces existing within and connected to conventional places, offers a thought provoking idea that can stimulate further investigation into fundamental interrelationships between space, experience and culture.

Ultimately, heterotopias can be physical or mental spaces that act as ‘other places’ alongside existing spaces. As revealed shortly within the context of Chernobyl and dark tourism, heterotopias conform to a number of principles. These include places where norms of conduct are suspended either through a sense of crisis or through deviation of behaviour. Heterotopias also have a precise and determined function and are reflective of the society in which they exist. They also have the power to juxtapose several real spaces simultaneously as well as being linked to the accumulative or transitory nature of time. Heterotopias are also places that not freely accessible as well as being spaces of illusion and compensation. In short, Foucault argued that we are now in an era of simultaneity, juxtaposition, of proximity and distance, of side-by-side, and of the dispersed.

With its all-encompassing and vaguely defined parameters, Foucault’s idea of heterotopia has been a source of both inspiration as well as confusion in the application of conceptual frameworks that shape public space. While a full critique of ‘heterotopology’ is beyond the scope of this study, the paradox of heterotopia is that they are spaces both separate from yet connected to all other places. In essence, heterotopias are spaces within

places and places within spaces. Therefore, in our contemporary world heterotopias are everywhere and, consequently, highlight the public-private binary opposition (Dehaene and De Caeter, 2008). Indeed, heterotopian places are collective or shared in nature, and are often perceived as marginal, interstitial and subliminal spaces. It is in this conceptual framework that heterotopias open up different, if not complex, layers of relationships between space and its consumption. Heynen (2008) argues that heterotopia, whilst being a 'slippery' term to employ offers potentially rich and productive readings of different spatial and cultural constellations and, accordingly, justifies the continuing use of the concept. On that premise, therefore, the space of Chernobyl as a contemporary tourism place can be viewed under a heterotopian lens. Firstly, however, an overview of the accident at Chernobyl provides a context for tourism to the site.

### **Chernobyl and the 'Dead Zone'**

Chernobyl, a site approximately 130km north of Kiev in the Ukraine and about 20km south of the Belarusian border, is no longer merely a nuclear power plant, but a term used to describe the calamitous events of 26 April 1986 when one of the nuclear reactors caught fire then exploded. Subsequently, the word *Chernobyl* has entered a contemporary lexicon to mean devastation and contamination of not only the physical environment, but also a term used to denote cultural destruction or a collapse in social relations (see for example, McKernan and Mulcahy, 2008). Chernobyl has also come to represent the 'standard', by which other nuclear accidents can be compared, including the 2011 tsunami-triggered disaster at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan. In particular, Chernobyl is used to determine the severity of nuclear accidents on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale, of which it currently holds the most severe of classification (IAEA, 2012). The four Soviet-designed graphite reactors at Chernobyl were constructed between 1970 and 1983, and when the accident occurred, it caused the largest uncontrolled radioactive release into the environment ever recorded for any civilian operation, including plutonium, iodine, strontium, and caesium (IAEA, 2012). Ultimately, the disaster was the result of a flawed reactor design that was operated with inadequately trained personnel and, arguably, a direct consequence of Cold War isolation and the resulting lack of a health and safety culture.

The explosion destroyed reactor number four at Chernobyl, killing two plant workers on the night of the accident, and a further 28 operators and fire fighters died within a few

weeks as a result of Acute Radiation Sickness (WNA, 2012). During the aftermath, up to 600,000 people, including soldiers, miners, plant workers and fire-fighters from across the former Soviet Union – referred to as ‘liquidators’ – were drafted in to decontaminate the site. The decontamination process included a hastily constructed concrete ‘sarcophagus’ which entombed the entire fourth reactor and the estimated 200 tonnes of highly radioactive material that remains deep inside. The sarcophagus allowed the continuing operation of the other reactors at the plant, of which the final reactor was producing energy up until 2000. As the sarcophagus is now leaking radiation from the destroyed reactor, the International Shelter Implementation Plan in the 1990s began raising the expected cost of US\$1.2billion for a new durable confinement structure. Construction on a New Safe Confinement Shelter commenced in April 2012 and is due to be completed by 2016 (WNA, 2012).

While debate over the number of deaths attributed to the disaster is still ongoing, partly due to lack of accurate records and politically contested criteria to determine Chernobyl-related mortality, a Greenpeace report suggests approximately 270,000 cancers within the affected region have been caused by the accident (Greenpeace, 2006). Greenpeace also conclude that since the disaster, 60,000 people in Russia and 140,000 people in Belarus and the Ukraine have died as a direct result of the incident. The report also examines ongoing health impacts of Chernobyl and argues that radiation from the disaster has had a devastating effect on survivors, including the ‘liquidators’; damaging immune and endocrine systems, leading to accelerated ageing, cardiovascular and blood illnesses, psychological disorders, chromosomal aberrations and an increase in foetal deformations (Greenpeace, 2006).

Initially, the Soviet authorities denied an accident had even occurred, and only admitted the disaster when a radioactive monitoring device at the Forsmark Nuclear Power Plant in Sweden alerted the world. Whereas the former Soviet Union wanted to downplay the incident, Medvedec (2011) argues its Cold War enemies wanted to extract a political advantage. This was no more apparent than in the forced, yet delayed, evacuation of the nearby town of Pripyat and its population of approximately 47,500 inhabitants. A town built in the 1970s to serve the Chernobyl nuclear power complex, the iconography of Pripyat – or ‘atomgrad’ – represented Soviet youth, modernity and progress (Phillips, 2004), yet was systematically looted and vandalised in the immediate aftermath of the evacuation. The evacuation of Pripyat two days after the explosion and a further 116,000 people evacuated a day later from villages within an arbitrary 30km radius around Chernobyl, created what is now commonly referred to as the ‘dead zone’. Hence, the Chernobyl disaster turned Pripyat,

an example of blocky architectural Brezhnev baroque, from an icon of modern Soviet planning and technology into an icon of Soviet political ineptness, bureaucratic incompetence, and technological calamity.

While there are no precise temporal or spatial boundaries, Chernobyl has had an enduring traumatic effect. The self-imposed exclusion zone that still surrounds the disaster site and the continuing hazards that remain within (as well as outside) are highly disputed. Indeed, the scientific community appear divided on how dangerous the dead zone actually is, which ‘hot-spot’ areas are the most contaminated, what diseases have been or are being caused, and who can contract them (WNA, 2012). For the layperson, including increasing number of tourists visiting the ‘zone’, the issue is even more acute. Arguably, however, experiencing radioactive danger may inject a sense of both thrill and anxiety for the contemporary tourist; yet the danger is invisible to the human senses and can only be mediated through specialised technology, such as Geiger counters and dosimeters. Of course, the chronology of radioactive pollution is far beyond human life spans or socio-cultural memory. In spite of that, or perhaps even because of that, Goatcher and Brunsden (2011) suggest there is a sense of the sublime in visiting Chernobyl – a sensation of seeking something there. Certainly, the birth defects, the still births, the tiredness, the headaches, the cancers, the deformed wildlife, the suffering and the physical dislocations are real, lived, experienced – and to the people affected they are clearly not natural (Fairlie, Sumer, and Nyagu, 2006; Petryna, 2002). These hazards elude the senses and our descriptive language; they remain un-grasped and misunderstood yet can now be experienced in a ‘dark tourism moment’. Thus, the touristification of Chernobyl and its dead zone is well underway and it is this that the chapter now turns.

### **Chernobyl: Towards Touristification**

In 1979, Andrei Tarkovsky released his critically acclaimed film *Stalker*, in which a professional tour guide – the Stalker – takes two travellers on a spiritual journey into a forbidden Zone in search of a mysterious room that can grant one’s deepest wish. Shot in and around an abandoned power station in Estonia, and inspired by the saga of ‘alien zones’ from the 1972 novel *Roadside Picnic*, Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* uses cinematic imagination to transform ghostly-beautiful rural landscapes and industrial topography into a science fiction terrain of a restricted and hazardous Zone. In the story, the Zone’s origins were a ‘breakdown at the

fourth bunker’ – Chernobyl’s fourth reactor ‘broke down’ – and with an enigmatic narrative and photography of ruinous and empty quality, the film has become to be seen as prophetic of the Chernobyl disaster (Coulthart, 2006; Dyer, 2009). Moreover, with many of the cast and crew, including Tarkovsky, dying prematurely of cancer – attributed somewhat to the polluted Estonian power station film set – the film provides a surreal popular culture narrative in which the real zone at Chernobyl can be consumed.

Consequently, tales of Chernobyl and its dead zone are becoming entrenched in popular culture. Examples include video games such as *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Pripjat*, or the horror mutant movie *Chernobyl Diaries* depicting ‘extreme tourism’ to the exclusion zone (Parker, 2012), or fiction novels such as the thriller *Chernobyl Murders* (Beres, 2008). These combine to provide meta-narratives in which the contemporary tourist to Chernobyl then consumes industrial ruins, environmental contamination and political decay. With an increasing number of internet blogs and online photographic galleries dedicated to Chernobyl and Pripjat, creating a demand, perhaps, for ‘toxic holidays’, the Ukrainian government has now officially sanctioned tourism to the dead zone (RT, 2012). Of course, tourism to Chernobyl may have more to do with the continuing economic impacts of the disaster, as well as showcasing Chernobyl’s ‘dark heritage’ to the influx of foreign visitors to the Euro 2012 football tournament, which was co-hosted by the Ukraine (with Poland). Indeed, as six per cent of the national budget of the Ukraine is currently devoted to Chernobyl-related benefits and programmes, there is a political desire to return some of the polluted land back to productive use (Choi, 2011).

Thousands of people have undertaken illegal so-called ‘Cherno-tours’ over the past decade or so (Bennetts, 2011). However, the recent licensing of tours by the Ukrainian authorities allows tourists approved access to the dead zone, complete with a ‘Stalker’ guide and dinner in the Chernobyl canteen. Additionally, the highly regulated tours offer tourists’ an opportunity to wander through the nuclear ghost town of Pripjat or to feed the unusually large and sometimes deformed catfish that reside in the nuclear power plant-cooling pond (Lehren, 2012). Moreover, tourists armed with individual Geiger counters can visit a number of deserted villages within the zone. Many of these former settlements are in much better condition than Pripjat and offer a unique glimpse into Soviet rural life. For instance, St Michael’s Church in the village of Krasnoe is still used for worship by the small number of elderly people who illegally returned to their homes after the disaster (Bennetts, 2011), but have since been granted residency on an individual basis (Choi, 2011). For a fee, tourists

embarking on a ‘riveting toxic adventure’ can now meet with these dead zone residents, and explore how they live in the world’s most radioactive ecosystem (Blackwell, 2012).

While measures employed to guard tourists against radiation include protective clothing and radiation badges, visitors still have to sign official waiver forms to relinquish any claim against ill health. The disclaimer that the Ukrainian government will not be liable for possible deterioration of visitors’ health because of their trip, suggests that “it’s safe, but don’t blame us if you get cancer” (Lyons, 2011, p.1). It is this, perhaps, the most obvious of indicators that tourists’ are about to enter the *zone*; a petrified ruin on a unprecedented scale that invites an altogether different mediation on not only spoiled landscapes, but also on man’s technological folly and even, perhaps, of civilisation itself (Dobraszczyk, 2010). Crucially, however, it is the tourist gaze of the formerly forbidden zone where the normative, rather than being erased, is modified – or rather more precisely – where the norms of ordinary life are under suspension. Thus, it is here where the ‘other place’ of Chernobyl is both witnessed and consumed, and dark tourism and heterotopology collide. Indeed, the principles of Foucault’s heterotopias, which have been uniquely entitled for this study and contextualised within the tourist experience at Chernobyl, remain the focus of this chapter.

### **Dark Tourism and the ‘Dead Zone’: A Heterotopian Framework**

While the interpretation, application and theoretical (de)construction of Foucault’s heterotopias is contested, as is the nature and scope of dark tourism, a number of heterotopian principles can shine light on Chernobyl as a tourism place and its relationship with the cultural condition of contemporary society. In particular, Foucault offered six principles that loosely outlined his notion of heterotopia. Undoubtedly, these principles will always possess inherent author bias in any interpretation. Notwithstanding this predisposition, the six principles of ‘heterotopology’ can be applied to the touristification of Chernobyl and the dead zone.

#### *Principle # 1: Heterotopias of Crisis and Deviation*

The first principle of heterotopias is that they are universal. In other words, every culture has them, although the forms they take are heterogeneous (Topinka, 2010). Foucault

defined two types of heterotopias; namely, heterotopias of crisis and, subsequently, heterotopias of deviation. In his heterotopias of crisis, Foucault suggested these were forbidden places reserved for individuals in times of social, cultural or political crises. Certainly, Chernobyl and its dead zone is a place of socio-cultural and political crisis, a remnant ‘forbidden’ place that highlights the upheavals and divisions of the Cold War and its sustained state of political and military tension. Yet, the post-Cold War world in which Chernobyl is now located offers new pressures, including religious fundamentalism, economic uncertainty, the unipolarity of the United States, the potential collapse of the Eurozone, the geopolitical implications of the Arab Spring, and a rebalancing of international hegemony with the rise of China. Consequently, Chernobyl might be perceived as a place in which the old world order offered a sense of (in)security, both in terms of socio-cultural identity as well as military-industrial complexes. Thus, touristification of Chernobyl and its dead zone permit crises of the old world order and its technological failings and political divisions to be consumed, yet contemporary tourists are simultaneously connected to the new world order of turbulent transformations in society, culture, politics, and economics. Therefore, Chernobyl as a heterotopia of crisis is where tourists can not only separate crises of the past, but also can (re)connect to present predicaments and contemplate future quandaries.

Importantly, however, the very fact that tourists are present at Chernobyl – a site of crisis – might suggest that tourist behaviour is deviant in relation to the required norm, thus revealing Foucault’s emergent heterotopia of deviation from heterotopias of crisis. Foucault originally argued that leisure in a society of consumption was a form of idleness and, in turn, a sort of deviation (or even crisis). Consequently, the term ‘deviant leisure’ has entered academic parlance to suggest behaviour in a place that goes against the prevailing moral grain of society (Stebbins, 1996; Rojek, 1999). Indeed, deviant leisure is commonly viewed as sensation-seeking behaviour that is immoral, unhealthy, or even dangerous (Williams, 2009). Of course, so-called deviant leisure activity in any dark tourism environment is relative and socially constructed within a framework of cultural norms (Biran and Poria, 2012). Even so, Chernobyl as a site of catastrophe is arguably a heterotopia of deviation in the sense that tourists’ are perpetrating deviant leisure. Yet, in this context, the very idea of deviance possesses qualities of a serious, even therapeutic leisure activity (Stebbins, 2007). In other words, deviant leisure is serious in that it offers tourists’ time and space to reflect upon otherwise taboo topics – in this case death, decay and the causes of disaster (Stone and

Sharpley, forthcoming). Consequently, Chernobyl as a heterotopia of deviation can provide a participatory tourist experience that is potentially fulfilling, rich in personal, political, technological and environmental meaning and, as a result, has the capability of building social or ‘mortality’ capital (Stone, 2012a,b).

### *Principle # 2: Heterotopias of Functionality*

The second principle suggests that each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society. Moreover, the same heterotopia can have duality of function, depending on the synchrony of the culture in which the heterotopia is located. In other words, heterotopias of functionality permit the connection of another place with ordinary cultural spaces. Foucault illustrated this functionality by arguing that cemeteries, as sacred spaces of the dead, have been relocated from the spiritual centre of the city to the outskirts of living places. As he points out, “the cemetery no longer constitutes the sacred and immortal belly of the city, but the ‘other city’, where each family possesses its dark dwelling” (Foucault [1967] cited in De Caeter and Dehaene, 2008, p.19). Ultimately, Foucault argues that the cardinal displacement of the cemetery and its heterotopian function allow the dead to be distant yet, importantly, also allow the living to connect with their dead.

This duality of both providing distance and allowing connection is inherent in Chernobyl as a heterotopia of functionality. Indeed, Chernobyl can function as a place where tourists may learn about a new world in the face of the collapse of old hegemonic securities. As Alexievich (1999, p. 174) points out after her visit to Chernobyl:

“[t]here are two states, separated by barbed wire: one is the zone, the other, everything else. People come to the zone as they do to a cemetery. It’s not just their house that is buried here, but an entire era. An era of faith. Of science. In a just social ideal.”

Consequently, Chernobyl and the dead zone now function as icons of a failed political dogma as well as being symbolic of distant utopian ideals and Soviet power. Yet, the site is also consumed by tourists as a pyramid of our technical age, a tomb of technological tragedy, and a symbol of our ruin to generations to come and, so, connects us to the fragility of our progress outside the zone.

### *Principle # 3: Heterotopias of Juxtaposition*

The third principle suggests that heterotopias have the power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces that are in themselves incompatible. It is here where the dead zone of Chernobyl offers the strange mixing up of conventional notions of ruins and monuments, yet is juxtaposed with the return of normality, of residents, of wildlife, and of tourism and commerce. Of course, wandering through, gazing upon and celebrating ruins has a long history. Edensor (2005), for example, argues that since the Renaissance onwards, the pleasure of ruins arrives from the juxtaposition of experiencing the impact of the past in the present; an opportunity to gaze on technological creations; as well as the revelling in the gothic qualities of death and decay. Chernobyl as a heterotopia of juxtaposition offers such combinations to tourists and, as such, the dead zone is slowly being brought back to life. In Pripjat, for example, Dobraszcyk (2010) juxtaposes both his trepidation and delight in the arbitrary arrangements of once ordered things – broken strip lights in a supermarket; the reappearance of utopian objects from the past – socialist icons left in a room; and the excess of meaning generated by inexplicable objects and juxtapositions – rusted hat stands alone in a decaying hall. Consequently, Pripjat is an empty place of both the familiar and the uncanny.

These juxtapositions present Pripjat as an alternative space – indeed, as a post-apocalyptic space – within the proverbial order of modern places. Yet, the town of Pripjat is a space of tragedy and the strange decomposition of the place serves to remind tourists of decay and incommensurable loss. However, as noted earlier, Pripjat’s ruin is largely the result of systematic looting, rather than natural decay or the accident, and its meaning “is irrevocably bound up with violent human agency rather than technological failure or the return of nature” (Dobraszcyk, 2010, p.381). Even so, Pripjat has been dubbed a ‘modern Pompeii’ (Todkill, 2001), and its juxtapositions of the real and the familiar with the surreal and the alien allow tourists to consume not only a sense of ruinous beauty and bewilderment, but also a sense of anxiety and incomprehension in a petrified place that mirrors our own world.

### *Principle # 4: Heterotopias of Chronology*

Heterotopian places begin to function fully when individuals find themselves in a sort of absolute break with their traditional time (Foucault, 1967). While tourists to Chernobyl are

clearly breaking from the routine of ordinary life by the act of visitation, what is more important perhaps is how a Chernobyl tourist experience can offer a sense of both the accumulation and transition of time. Indeed, the fourth principle suggests heterotopias are linked to slices of time, termed by Foucault as 'heterochronism'. In other words, Chernobyl as a heterotopia of chronology is similar to a museum. As such it accumulates time and collects evidence of an age in a perpetual and indefinite manner. Hence, tourists consume not only the disaster of Chernobyl and inherent socio-cultural, political, and environmental meanings, but also the era in which the disaster occurred. Metaphorically speaking, time at Chernobyl is stored and accumulated for generations to come, allegorically stopped by the concrete sarcophagus around reactor number four and monumentalised. However, the improvised and precarious nature of the current sarcophagus – symbolically associated with the Kremlin-based sarcophagus of Vladimir Lenin and Marxism-Leninism ideals – has come to represent a socialist era that failed. Hitherto, Chernobyl is not dead; it is just set in stone.

When the accident occurred in 1986, time was arrested and the mandated zone around the site essentially ceased to function at that moment. Apocalyptic visions of ruined cities within cinematic and literary imaginations over the past century or so have preconditioned us to ruination, fear and decay; yet, blurred distinctions between the real and the surreal within the dead zone are now part of the (dark) tourist experience. Although these distinctions are being conserved and accumulated by the museumification of Chernobyl, Foucault argues for another type of heterochronism. Particularly, while heterotopias of chronology can be linked to accumulation and conservation of time, there are heterotopias that are linked to time in its most futile, most transitory, and most precarious state (Foucault, 1967). Foucault suggested these heterotopias existed in festive mode and were not eternitary, but chronic. Hence, the ever-recurring and habitual nature of tourism to Chernobyl can reveal it as a heterochronism that is fleeting and transient. Tourists visiting Chernobyl are regulated to spend short periods in the dead zone and consume the landscape in a moment. It is here that heterotopias of chronology come together, both by witnessing the accumulation of time at Chernobyl and by the temporary touristic consumption of the dead zone.

#### *Principle # 5: Heterotopias of (De)Valorisation*

The fifth principle suggests that heterotopias presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. Termed here as heterotopias of

(de)valorisation, heterotopian places must have a system of rituals or what Foucault called ‘purifications’ in order to both valorise (open up) and de-valorise (close down) the space. As Foucault ([1967] cited in De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008, p.21) notes, “one can only enter with a certain permission and after having performed a certain number of gestures”. In the case of Chernobyl, the rituals of valorisation and gaining (temporary) access to the site is evidenced in the regulatory framework and the payment of fees that now surrounds tourist applications to enter the zone. Moreover, the gestures of medical disclaimers as well as the issuing of health and safety equipment to tourists prior to their Chernobyl experience provide a basis for Foucault’s purification rites – a way of valorising the dead zone as an-Other place. On leaving the zone, tourists are subject to physical checkpoints and further health and safety testing before being allowed to exit. Again, these apparent purification rituals de-valorise the extraordinary place of the dead zone and allow the tourist back into ordinary space.

However, on the contrary, Foucault argued that heterotopias of (de)valorisation that look like pure and simple openings and closings, generally, conceal certain exclusions. He suggested that one “can enter into heterotopian places, but in fact it is only an illusion: one believes to have entered and, by the very fact of entering, one is excluded” (Foucault [1967] cited in De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008, p. 21). It is here that a staged authenticity of Chernobyl is perceived as tourists ritually enter a decaying landscape that is contrived somewhat by human intervention. Indeed, the ghost town of Pripjat has seen thousands of visitors, many of them urban photographers who have (re)arranged ordinary everyday items to create juxtapositions for emblematic effect. For example, in a ruined school in Pripjat, toy dolls left by evacuated children have been posed with baleful looking gasmasks – a graphic image of the threat to youth – an image subsequently consumed by tourists as real yet is staged (RT, 2012). Arguably, therefore, despite being allowed valorised access to the place, manufacturing the presentation of artefacts potentially excludes tourists from the authentic reality of the evacuation itself.

#### *Principle # 6: Heterotopias of Illusion and Compensation*

The final trait of heterotopias is that they create illusions that expose all real spaces and, as result, create a place that is Other. In turn, this can compensate us for the angst of the contemporary world in which we live. In short, heterotopias of illusion and compensation bring binaries between the real and surreal into focus. Indeed, at Chernobyl, the reality of the

place is consumed as a surreal tourist attraction. Yet, the question remains, what is the ‘attraction’? Ruined landscapes are presented as visions of technical and political folly, and consumed as society’s superciliousness for the natural environment as well as a warning of apocalypse to civilization itself. The illusion of course is the authorities’ endeavour to try to persuade tourists that the manufactured calamity of Chernobyl has been regulated, limited, and thus controlled. Tourists consume this ostensible illusion as they wander through the dead zone, arbitrarily protected by Geiger counters that sing warnings of impending ailments. However, while tourists attempt to capture the horror of Chernobyl, the Otherness of the place begins to elude the senses and a feeling of the sublime can give way to feelings of a pervasive anxiety inherent in contemporary society (Goatcher and Brunsdon, 2011). Hence, not only does Chernobyl represent a microcosm of an apocalyptic world, the ordinary world outside the dead zone is brought to the fore and exposed for all its political disorder and fragile societal frameworks in which we are all located.

Consequently, the tourist experience in the Other place of Chernobyl can produce a heterotopia of compensation. Indeed, the place of Chernobyl offers a counterbalance space that links us to present-day concerns of the possible ruin of our own environments. Therefore, the Chernobyl tourist experience takes place in a (relatively) safe and socially sanctioned environment in which feelings of helplessness of preventing the accident stimulates an enhanced awareness of the fragility of our modern world. In that context, any notion of helplessness caused by a Chernobyl tourist experience is compensated as a positive and life-enhancing response to the inevitable (Dobraszczyk, 2010), and even according to Sennett (1994), a quality of being that stimulates an enhanced awareness of others. As Dobraszczyk (2010, p.387) states, “if the voices of Chernobyl and Pripjat are to speak to us clearly, they must do so through the ruin that bears witness to them... in this sense, ruins become the foundation on which to build the future”.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter arises from a simple yet fundamental interest in the psychogeographical attributes of dark tourism. Adopting a Foucaultian perspective of heterotopias, the research offers a contextualised conceptual framework in which to locate dark tourism experiences and their interrelationship with a place of death and disaster. Of course, Foucault’s notion of heterotopias, derived from a lecture in 1967, is frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent and

even incoherent (Soja, 1996). Yet, despite these acknowledged characteristics and limitations, this study has interpreted key principles of Foucault's heterotopias and applied them within the context of dark tourism to Chernobyl, Pripjat and the surrounding dead zone. In so doing, six heterotopian principles have been correlated with the touristification of Chernobyl and, consequently, illustrate how a site of catastrophe can be consumed within the contemporary visitor economy.

Of course, this research has offered only a preliminary and exploratory synthesis between the philosophical notion of heterotopia and dark tourism. Undoubtedly, further theoretical research and empirical interrogation at a variety of dark tourism sites will be required to reveal the extent and support for dark tourism as heterotopias. Even so, as the summative model in Figure 1 illustrates, dark tourism places may exist in a conceptual cylinder of heterotopian space, whereby each principle of heterotopia in no particular order, rather than giving a linear experience, combine to provide an encompassing tourist encounter of Other places.

**INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE PLEASE**

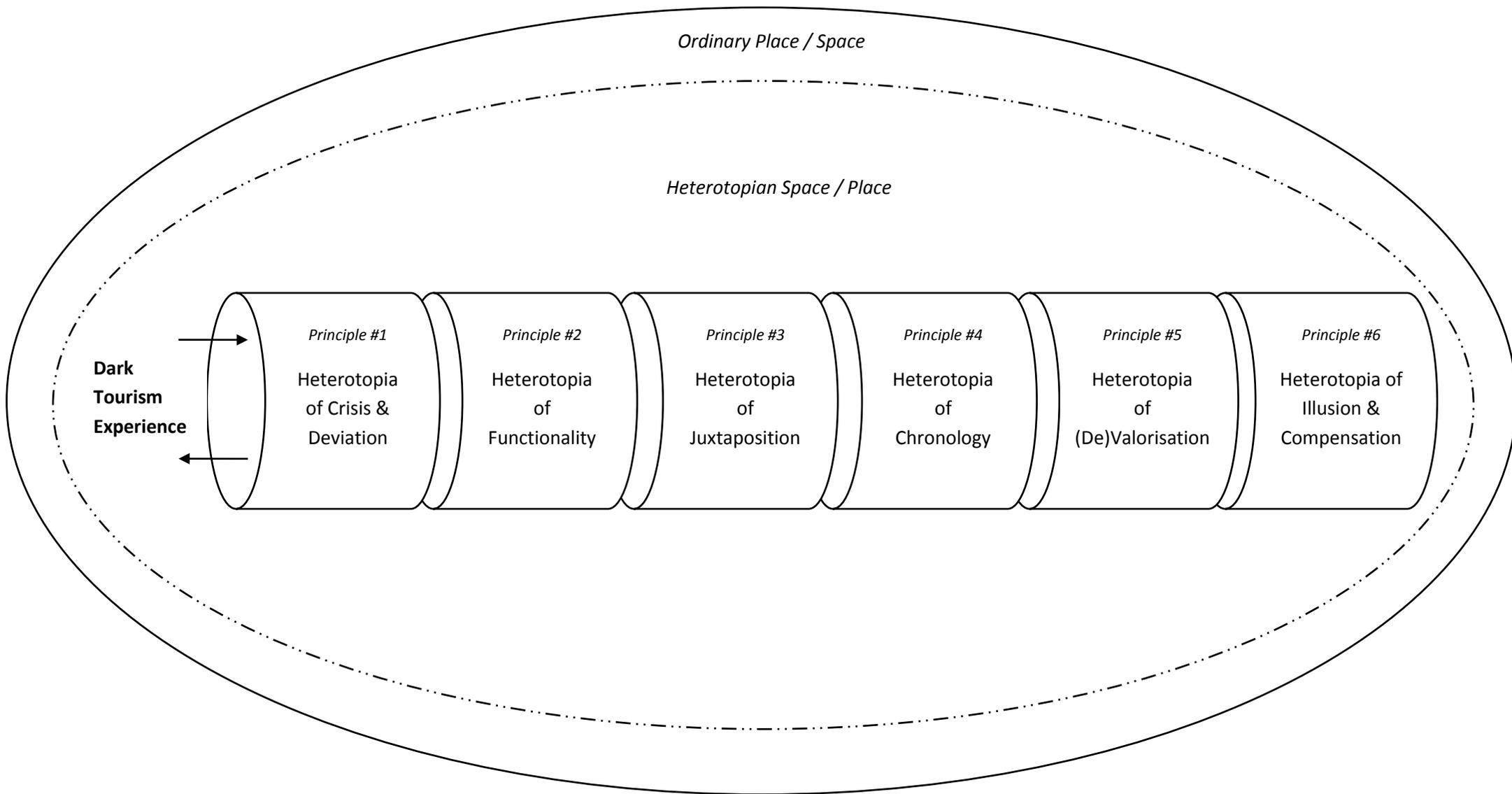
In summary, Chernobyl is now an-Other place. It exists alongside ordinary spaces of the everyday, yet it is a place where disaster has been captured and suspended. It is a place of crisis, of deviation, of serious reflection. It has a functionality that is determined by its touristic consumption and, in turn, is reflective of the society in which we exist. A surreal place to juxtapose our apocalyptic nightmares, Chernobyl is both real and imagined. It is a space for time and of the time, a place that accumulates the failures of a political era and consumed by transient tourists in dark tourism moments. Finally, Chernobyl possesses rituals to valorise its penetrability, to allow temporary access to a so-called dead zone that is both illusionary and compensatory. Chernobyl is a heterotopia that allows us to gaze on a post-apocalyptic world, in which the familiar and uncanny collide. Indeed, tourists now ritually consume the place as a site of environmental disaster, failed technology and political collapse. Yet, Chernobyl and its dead zone is a surreal space that reflects the reality of our contemporary world – a world exposed by dark tourism.

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**Figure 1: A Dark Tourism Cylinder:  
A conceptual model showing the dark tourism experience within a heterotopian framework**