

Corporate Art Venues as Heterotopias, R.S. de Boer

"We proved we are not the marketing department of Vitra, but an independent museum with an absolute neutral point of view in documenting the evolution of industrial design." Alexander von Vegesack, director of Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein (Germany), 15 July 2009.

My paper critically rethinks the dubious claim of European companies (e.g. Vitra, Daimler, Banco Espírito Santo, LaCaixa) that their exhibition spaces, with the pretence to corporate social responsibility, resemble independent museums.

The main objective is to theoretically discuss the public nature of corporate art venues. To what extent have companies envisioned a specific role which they cast down upon the visitors of their exhibition spaces? How can one define the ways in which corporate art venues seek to determine a certain experience which they aim to impose on their visitors? To what extent do corporate art venues operate for or in front of a certain audience?

To this end I shall focus on Foucault's (1986) notion of heterotopias. Heterotopias presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. Everyone can enter into heterotopian sites, but that does not make them public. In this sense, corporate art venues seem to be open, but generally may hide curious exclusions.

In my paper I will investigate to what extent corporate art venues as heterotopias correspond to predecessors likewise the aristocratic cabinets of curiosity, as they seem to function in opposite to the modern Western museum (Wyss 2008, Groys 1998).

My paper will demonstrate that the apparent public nature of corporate art venues can be qualified as one which may exclude the visitor of from the view of the sometimes clandestine or fraudulent business transactions of a company. On that account, an alleged instrumentality could be at hand, since corporate cultural politics, under which corporate art venues are in force, have always been designed by companies to seek and consolidate a broader legitimacy in society (Grasskamp 1998, Rectanus 2002).