

Heterotopia

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Good morning, today Nicole and I will introduce you to “*Heterotopia*” which is a performative installation by Andreas Hannes. It is about perspectives, intimacy and places, and is made for small audiences. His work addresses issues connected to human nature and socio-cultural constructs starting from his personal experiences, sharings and insights. Privacy, vulnerability, trust and fragility are being addressed through the intimate encounter in between the audience and the performers themselves.

Michel Foucault contests the traditional notion of linear time, asserting that concepts of time have been understood in various ways, under varying historical circumstances. Foucault's idea corresponds with our understanding of space over time. He establishes two unique sites, utopias and heterotopias, which are linked to other spaces, yet are also in contradiction to those other sites to which they are linked. An utopia is a fundamentally unreal space. In contrast, a heterotopia a real space, which is simultaneously mythic and real. All cultures have heterotopias, according to Foucault, who provides two categories and five principles to explain the concept's application in reality. The categories include the heterotopia of crisis and deviation, respectively. The first refers to sacred and forbidden places, including the site of the bride's “deflowering” on the honeymoon trip. The second refers to places where people are placed when they do not conform to the norm, including rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons. His five principals are as follows: 1.) All cultures constitute heterotopias; 2.) Heterotopias can change function within a single society; 3.) They may take the form of contradictory sites, such as the representation of a sacred garden as a microcosm of the world in the patterns of a Persian rug; 4.) They are linked with a break in traditional time, identifying spaces that represent either a quasi-eternity, like museums, or are temporal, like fairgrounds; 5.) Heterotopias are not freely accessible, they are entered either by compulsory means, such as jail, or their entry is based on ritual or purification, like Scandinavian saunas, and Moslem hammans. [H. Nasstrom Evans.] Because they break down boundaries within and between places into spaces of ‘otherness’, Foucault (1967:26) called them heterotopias. Like utopias, heterotopias relate to other spaces by both representing and at the same time inverting or distorting them. Unlike utopias, which are unattainable and inherently unreal, heterotopias are real spaces.

A cinema, for example, is a space of otherness amid more ordinary spaces, “a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space” (Foucault 1967:26). In it, the real world and the fiction of the movie are juxtaposed, and the visitors are drawn into the story of the heroes and villains projected on the screen.

Many people find white serene and pure, while others feel that it is stark and cold. One thing

to keep in mind is colour can have different meanings, symbolism, and associations in other cultures. In Western cultures, the colour white is often associated with weddings, hospitals, and angels and is often used to convey a sense of purity, cleanliness, and peacefulness. White is bright and can create a sense of space or add highlights which you will see once we introduce you to the artwork.

This brings us to our artefact: "Heterotopia" by Andreas Hannes. "Heterotopia" evokes an "otherising" participation of the audience, with ambiguous messages of how they, the spectators, fit into the picture. The installation consists of a large enclosed tubular construction with the performance inside. In order to view the performance, the audience has to lay on the ground, and peer through a small gap at the bottom of the construction. The construction isolates the audience from the performance, yet they were invited and are able to view it from this obscure angle and uncomfortable position. Heterotopia is a spatio-temporal discourse and this relates to this piece in how the two performers interact with each other and how they spend this time during the performance. The audience is in such a small distance from them, that they can even touch them if they wanted to. This is opposed to normal performance arts where the artist is in safe distance from the viewer, probably on a stage.

Foucault is one of the many philosophers who worked on human subjectivity with phenomenological considerations relying on space and time. In Foucault's essay, *Of other spaces*, he describes two extremes: illusion that exposes the real world as still more unreal, and a space of perfection to compensate for the flaws of real life. He calls for a society with many heterotopias, because these places affirm difference through its multiple interpretations. Utopias offer some relief, although they have no location, they are untroubled regions, where things are easy. However, heterotopias answer to the external real spaces of existence and the heterogeneity of them, making them very complex.

Inside the construction, the environment is white & brightly lit. A pure & clean, or maybe a clinical & impersonal space? The two performers are only wearing white briefs with their upper bodies exposed. They embody the natural beauty of the human body, or do they also shamelessly expose imperfections that the human body might have? During the performance, they seem to want to be close to each other, and not close to each other at the same time. The performers move very slowly, almost in slo-motion, as if they are still half way asleep. So could it be that they are portraying an intimate space of the bedroom, attempting to keep it private by constructing those white walls, but failing because of the gap at the bottom where anybody can look inside. This clearly is a battle between a private and public space. The complete environment with the performance conveys desperate and ambiguous messages. Putting the artwork, & the audience in a liminal space, and re-affirming Foucault's 5th principle: a system that both isolates and makes

them penetrable. Or is this heterotopia trying to move away from these dichotomies, proposing a world that is continuous? The phenomenological understanding that our self comes to existence in the space between the body and the outside space, expands our view to conceptually include all sorts of varied perspectives. After about 15 minutes of moving around on the floor, very close to the audience, the performers start to hoist themselves up with black straps attached to the ceiling. This causes the viewer to try and obtain a better viewpoint by shifting into a new position, and moving slightly into the construction. The moment when the performers hoist themselves up, this heterotopic scene converts to Foucault's second principle, which is 'Heterotopias of deviation', places where individuals whose behaviour is outside the norm of society are held. Could this construction be an asylum of some sort, where the individuals are overly medicated?

Heterotopic spaces create spaces where the observer becomes a vital part in the process as being the subject and a hybridisation of otherness, a generalisation of space at the expense of the individual. The Andreas Hannes' art piece forces us to re-establish the role of the spectator's position because the spectator plays a vital role in the work itself. In this figure, surveillance and the ambiguity of being watched add a unique layer of complexity. The performers know that they are being observed by an audience. Thus, the heterotopia of this performance on the one hand opens up a new kind of space where selection, formulation and articulation of content is more readily available, but on the other hand the increased transparency puts added constraints on the performance and encourages questioning its authenticity. The two performers can feel they can be themselves and experience it as a space where they finally come into their own. Other technical possibilities enable the performers to present a constantly up-to-date representation of that changing self. However, the performance features also opens both new possibilities for inauthenticity and for its detection, as the audience may question their relationship with their partner. It also questions how far the audience will go to invade the performers space, as we are as a society we all want to be in our own bubbles but as you can see in his performance piece the audience is spectators of this relationship space. It can show how society has evolved and how we are more intrigued by other relationship other than our own.

In conclusion, society can reshape existing heterotopias. Spaces are filled with narratives and subjectivities, which is why there are no neutral spaces. Each space causes its own 'psychasthenia', which is the proneness of people to lose themselves in their surroundings, a type of temptation that space creates. Perhaps this is the purpose of heterotopias, not as a method of categorising spaces, but a way to examine social spaces, how they create new discourses, what those spaces are, and what they may mean. Discourses about knowledge, power and society, which ultimately are reflected in the constitution of our human relationships.