Spring 5-5-2018

Profanation

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Profanation

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Master of

Fine Arts Studio Art, Hunter College

The City University of New York

May 2018

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Prologue

“Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction. The laws of its reception are most instructive.” Walter Benjamin

This work will follow on my interest in architecture as it shifted and evolved since my relocation from Tel-Aviv to New York. Following Benjamin’s notion, the laws of architecture’s reception are those I am interested in questioning and manipulating through my work. I moved to New York from Tel-Aviv in January 2015, right after the 2014 war between Israel and Gaza. Only months afterwards I realized the effect the war had on me. Coming from a country that has experienced many wars, and where protection and security are mandatory values in everyday life, I am interested in isolating those elements and trying to investigate this sense of ‘The Need For Security’. This paper will follow my work as it has shifted from looking to respond to Israeli security architecture to looking at my immediate environment in Manhattan, where I live and where my studio is located. This has raised my interest in institutional architecture, and the invasion of the Non-place as Marc Augi defined it, a type of architecture that has no history and no identity. The third chapter will describe my final project with my progress during my third year at Hunter. I will try to merge those two approaches and take it one step farther into the unknown, in a very pretentious statement, to create my own type of architecture.

2 Berger, Miriam. Israel's 'Checkpoint Q': a daily hurdle for Palestinians. Reuters, APRIL 26, 2017
Gateway

Throughout my work I have been interested in ever-intensifying security systems of contemporary society and wanted to investigate how every day experiences have been affected by state-controlled security measures. One of the first works I made during my first semester at Hunter is called Gateway, which was a proposal for a sculpture that is “inspired” by the border architecture of Kalandia checkpoint. Kalandia checkpoint is one of the largest Israeli military checkpoints in the occupied West Bank. This checkpoint is not located on a border, but between the Palestinian town Ramallah, Kalandia refugee camp, and the Palestinian town of ar-Ram. It separates Ramallah residents from southern Palestinian towns and the northern Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem. This checkpoint is used by the Israeli military to control Palestinian access to Israel.

Image no.1: Gateway, 2015, maquette, 18 x 39 x 4 inches

My proposal came as maquette made of plastic sticks in scale of 1:20 (image no.1). I chose to construct only a section of the checkpoint where Palestinians have to wait for

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2 Berger, Miriam. *Israel’s ‘Checkpoint Q’: a daily hurdle for Palestinians*. Reuters, APRIL 26, 2017
hours inside a fenced barricade to cross into Israel each day for work. Therefore the maquette suggests a structure that is made of two turnstiles and fences that connects them to each other. Moreover I chose to make the *Gateway* longer than the actual structure of Kalandia in order to extend the crossing experience. As a proposal for an interactive piece, this work will be completed through the viewers’ experience: as they move in and around the immersive structure and transgress its boundaries, the meaning of the architecture shifts between ‘forum’ and ‘prison,’ a space for watching or being watched.

Image no.2: *Gateway*, 2015, maquette, 18 x 39 x 4 inches

The actual sculpture will be made of steel tubes as this work aims to create a structure that not only conveys the heavy loaded physicality of border crossings from Palestine to Israel but also evokes its relocation as a passage where there is no border to cross. Therefore the crossing gets a different meaning, a space that has no significance, a space in between, become a place.

As a reference to the *Gateway* project, I am interested in the work of the artist Adrian Paci, whose practice deals with displacement and migration as a result of socio-economic circumstances. His work is also influenced by his own history of fleeing to
Italy with his family after the riots in Albania in 1997. Mainly I am interested in his video piece from 2007 called, *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea* (image no.3).

![Image no.3: Adrian Paci, *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, 2007](image)

In this video we see a queue of men ascending mobile aircraft boarding stairs, yet they carry no baggage and there is no plane. The aircraft stairs becomes a strange raft in the middle of this in-between place, suggesting notions of deportation and the transportation of labor. Like Paci, my perspective has also been informed by my family’s refugee history. As someone who comes from a family of Libyan-Jewish refugees, I want to use my own experience as a bridge to connect with current issues of displacement and contemporary border control. In Paci’s work the men eventually are standing still, it is the passive mode of waiting that becomes active. I am also interested in his use of architecture, such as the structure of the aircraft boarding stairs that used to be a passage where people cross into the plane or out of it, into the state or away from it. Here, Paci gives the structure a different meaning: it is no longer a temporary in-between stage but it is what holds all the men together in permanent place.

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4 Photo credit: James Joel [https://www.flickr.com/photos/98701585@N02/9348863113/in/photolist](https://www.flickr.com/photos/98701585@N02/9348863113/in/photolist)
Continuing with my interests in mechanisms of control and supervision, I have looked to the omnipresent in the contemporary cityscape of my surroundings. During my second year at Hunter and as part of the Mid-program project, I created the work called Capsule (image 4), taken from the architecture of a local institution. The Capsule is an architectural structure that is 1 foot wide, 12 feet long and 8 feet high. It is a compressed space made of wood, acoustic ceiling panels, cornice, floor tiles, Silicon, industrial florescent lights and a clock hanging on the wall. Two double-sided mirrors seal the narrow structure and create a hidden hierarchy. The capsule functions as a slice of autonomous space that has its own set of rules. It is inaccessible and sealed, with no entrance or exit, but with a view through its windows. When installed in the space, the only light source comes from the sculpture: cold fluorescents light its interior space while the viewer is left in the darkness to peep into another reality.
This project is based on research that deals with the relationship between the individual and apparatus\(^5\) as embodied in architectural structures. In particular this work represents my interest in the entrances of secured buildings, and the way they function as a checkpoints to access the institution, forming a mechanism of observation and hierarchy. The aesthetics of such a place – or ‘non-place’ – plays a crucial role in my work in the way it has no signifiers of history or identity in its elements\(^6\). I choose to recreate it in the capsule as a falsified environment that reconstructs those relations.

One of the artists that influenced this work is Absalon, who is known for his prototypes of one-person living cells. For Absalon, the cells were supposed to be

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functional and he tried to create his own territory in contrast to the city architecture of Paris. In my work, I’m also interested in creating a cell, a territory, but unlike Absalon’s work, in my work the cell is sealed, which turns it into a capsule. In my work, home is in between places, in the passage, exposing the corridor as static, standing still with no traffic.

Image no.7: Capsule, 2018, installation view, 205 Hudson Gallery

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7 Photo credit: Tomislav Medak, https://www.flickr.com/photos/tomislavmedak/536697724
For my thesis project at Hunter College, I wish to provoke an Israeli American dialogue that comes through profanity of conventional architecture. I am creating this dialogue by displaying two main subjects in proximity to each other: border architecture from Israel and institutional architecture or non-places in New York.

My work has been influenced by the Stanford prison experiment from 1971, which was a study of the psychological effects of becoming a prisoner or prison guard. The main conclusion of the experiment was that the situation, rather than the individual personalities, caused the participants' behavior. The guards and prisoners adapted to their roles more than was expected; both prisoners and guards became grossly absorbed in their roles leading to dangerous and psychologically damaging situations. Through my research I’m investigating the role of site relations, how artificial spaces effect situational attribution of behavior or dispositional attribution.

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Therefore, I see each work I present in my thesis as a device rather than a passive object; each work creates different situations and places the viewer in different roles. In the Gateway device the viewer can be either inside the checkpoint as a subject to be checked or outside the Gateway as the non-checked subject. Here, unlike the Stanford experiment, the viewer can experience both roles, it is an open device.

In the Capsule installation the viewer is placed behind a one-way mirror, in a role usually reserved for the guard, or the one in power who observes the other. The capsule as a sealed autonomous environment is the ultimate surveillance device, though the option of a subject to surveillance is taken away as no one can enter the capsule and only the architecture or the situation is left to question.
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