*The Tel Aviv Transcripts*

Hadas Ophrat’s Exhibit in collaboration with Yuval Yairi

Public spaces are undergoing a continuous process of privatization. The commons, originally designed to serve the public, are gradually being taken away and transferred either directly into private hands, or through private subleasing of site management, operating services, security, etc. This process touches and impacts energy infrastructures, public transportation, terminals, ports and border crossings, shopping malls, medical centers, education, sport, cemeteries, and, of course, public spaces (*the commons*).

The commons represent social and political potential. The public, through its presence and usage of the space manifests and exhibits its civil right – its right to the land and the city. This is not merely a democratic right; it is also an affinity, a connection, and a claim of ownership over the space, stemming from an understanding that the mere act of usage (dwelling, work, education, recreation, etc.) establishes the space. "The common is threaded through our everyday existence, its minor practices and rhythms, and therein lies its deep architectural significance.[[1]](#footnote-1)"

In cases of unused spaces and places that are un-supervised or not monitored, the owners or the local municipality lose their hegemony upon them. Here I am referring to spaces that are unpopulated or remain unclaimed, even for given intervals during the day. These include public spaces without a specific function, such as streets, passages, entrances, backyards, parking lots, basements, and rooftops. For the most part, these are spaces whose function is public and communal.

Does the collaborative or shared potential of a place grant it the status of a public domain? Marcel Smets, who coined the term “the unclaimed space,[[2]](#footnote-2)” argues that shared experience is a fundamental component of the public domain. A lobby is such a space: it lacks identity, it’s a hybrid, often neglected, located between the private and the public; a non-binding meeting point between residents and guests, strangers for the most part. The lobby is what remains of social ideals of partnership and communalism. The planning of the ground floor and entrance space of many multi-tenant buildings, among other things, testifies to their social and environmental function as an open, collaborative and interpersonal space. However, through a decades-long process, this intermediate space has lost the communal potential for which it was designed. Open (unroofed or enclosed) entrances – lobbies – of multi-tenant buildings are becoming few and far between, due to either reasons of security or personal isolation and alienation from the environment.

**It is into this void that my artistic project seeks to forcefully penetrate. It aims to violate its closure and segregation.**

The architect Bernard Tschumi, in his book *The Manhattan Transcripts* (1981), describes the relationship between human action and space through sketches of scenarios of human activity within urban spaces. His is a very creative and defiant move. Tschumi’s statement that space, movement (or action) and events manifest and establish architecture is formulated as an illustrated manifesto.

The event, underlying Tschumi’s theory, is not based on a real occurrence or situation that actually took place. There is an invented, metaphoric dimension here that expresses in an analogous manner current urban dynamics in relation to a specific place (Central Park or 42nd Street in New York), which Tschumi seeks to relocate elsewhere. The event transcribes an action from one unrelated place to another. The four episodes he describes (the park, street, tower, and block) in his book, *Manhattan Transcripts*, are dramatic situations. He deconstructs every episode into a sequence of images, a kind of cinematic storyboard. This dismantling is actually a planning tool, like a notation of a spatial “partita.”

The main innovation of Tschumi’s method lies in his laying out the scenarios on a timeline, since we are dealing with an action and not a static state. The developmental potential of an object may manifest through the actual (performative) use of it. Spatial understanding in its social context devotes a role to the using-body (the performer) and the manner of usage/action that it performs.

In this exhibition I am presenting the fifth episode inspired by Bernard Tschumi’s work – the lobby. The event that I am performing is an intrusion into the lobby of a building at   
6 Arlozorov St., Tel Aviv, which functions as an art exhibition space. The gallery walls display transcripts documenting the break-in. The transcripts include documentation of break-in attempts captured from different perspectives by the building’s security cameras, and blueprints/drawings of the relationship between body and space – the performer and the exhibition space. The relationship between body (use) and space (building) is inherently intrusive and disruptive, in which one order, mental and physiological, imposes its conduct code upon another.

The break-in is designed to undermine the autonomy of The Lobby’s space and disturb its isolation and detachment. It is inherently a violent and lawless act, regardless of the legitimacy and justification it derives from being part of and necessary for an artistic act. The exhibition space of The Lobby is privately owned, but is not a commercial gallery. It projects openness and invites the public to enter, despite the fact that its doors are usually locked and access is by appointment only. In this space, the distortion created by mixing public and private usage and interests is very noticeable. Architecturally, the space is enclosed in glass partitions and cement walls; it is a twilight zone – transparent-opaque, open-closed – that maintains complex relations between the internal and external. As a result of the unique Z-shaped structure of the space, two opposite perspectives occur concurrently. Images of the entrance into The Lobby space and the reversed viewpoint from the back capture the gaze within a kind of visual loop.

I believe that the actions of a body within a constructed space alter that space; liberate it. Different viewpoints enable different readings and interpretations of the space.

At the entrance to The Lobby there is a speaker’s podium, equipped with a microphone, which allows one to respond to the situation or form a dialogue with it. Within The Lobby space a listener’s chair has been placed. The opening and closing events of the exhibition include a twenty-minute lecture given within a performative format, from the speaker’s podium, while the intruder is seated, masked, at the listener’s station. Dan Handler, researcher and architectural curator, opened the exhibit with a lecture titled*: Sofas in Purgatory: the Israeli Lobby in the Age of Advanced Marketing*.

Hadas Ophrat

May 22nd - June 26th, 2015, 2015

The Lobby – Space for Art, 6 Arlozorov St., Tel Aviv

1. Lucia Jalón Oyarzun, Common Spatialities: The Production of the Multitude, Footprint Architecture Theory Journal 16, Delft, 2015. P. 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rafi Segal, Els Verbakel (editors), Architecture and Dispersal, AD, 2008, pp. 103, 105 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)