

CAN ALTAY

BORN 1975, TURKEY; LIVES AND WORKS IN ANKARA, TURKEY

An architect, artist, designer, and scholar, Can Altay is interested in unorthodox appropriations of the built environment. Influenced by Georges Bataille's ideas on transgression, Michel Foucault's ideas on power and non-normativity, and Henri Lefebvre's conceptions of social space as well as by art history, Altay approaches his subject matter from a number of discursive directions. His current project, the minibar projections, is an exploration, documentation, and exhibition of the transgressive use of semipublic spaces by young people. Minibars, named by the youth who create and use them, are impromptu gathering places around and in-between buildings in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. Architectural and geographic "one night stands," they are, in the words of the artist, "a utilisation of physical environment for an event [outside of the intent of] the builders, designers, and residents." These locations become places through occupation, use, and social relations, much as Lefebvre proposed in The Production of Space. Altay's project documents these appropriations in the form of an audiovisual installation—slides, taken at the minibars, are projected in the gallery, along with sound recordings from the events. Viewers are immersed in the experience of the minibars and the space, sometimes casting shadows as they walk through the projected light.

Altay's documentation of informal participants' occupation of the semipublic realm and the resulting architectural and social response (heightened fences, the erection of metal bars) alerts us to the increasing privatization of our surroundings and the almost complete lack of truly public space in the urban sphere. Additionally, his work captures fleeting moments in time, a sense reinforced by the age of the young minibar occupants, who are poised at the edge of adulthood.

Altay was featured in Eve Hediyeşi, Oda Projesi, Istanbul, Turkey (2002); Becoming a Place, Proje4L Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Art (2001); and an exhibition at the Çankaya Center for Contemporary Arts in Ankara (2000).

—Aimee Chang

the minibar projections

The minibars; as anonymously named by the people who have come to be producing them, are spaces that residential or commercial apartment buildings provide, which have been utilized by groups of youngsters for their night-life. The provided space is not an interior or a defined space. The minibar is located in an in-between space; a gap; literally the space between the apartment buildings.

Minibars are a spot in the nightlife of people, located in a particular district of Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. The act is a "one night stand" in all its aspects, a group of people come together between these buildings, utilise and accommodate space by the very tools these buildings offer; fence walls, parking space, etc.- and doing so, to spend the night drinking and socializing. It is a squatting act, where exploitation to a certain degree takes place, it is a production of space, a utilisation of physical environment for an event other than the intentions the builders, designers, and residents have had. The key point is that the minibar act turns the space into something it was never intended to be, and even ever would have thought to turn out to be.

The potential that this act, or the minibar as an unbuilt, but produced space holds, is that it points to a possibility for transgression of architecture, or the possibility of an architecture of transgression. This mutual act of occupying and thus reshaping space, points to a production of space through an alternative engagement with the given or found physical environment. What is at stake is a doing of architecture by undoing the very architecture that provides the grounds for the act. But then again not undoing it in physical terms but just by being there.

In the course of events, the residents took their turn to shape the space (but they performed this physically); fences got higher, metal bars were raised to disable the minibar acts, and thus minibars started to move elsewhere (between or in front of other buildings in the surrounding). This fact that the minibars had no physical attachments other than the squatted street and the bits and pieces of built environment that the buildings provided, enabled the act (in any case of built intervention or police patrol that risks its existence) to relocate itself in any physical surrounding that provided the certain physical elements needed to hang around.

The minibar projection is a work involved in documenting the minibars through an audio-visual installation. While documenting the situation through slides shows and sound recordings, the minibar projections are proposed to engage those who encounter the work in a spatial experience, enabling them to view and hear the documentation on surfaces they can work through and at moments intervene to the presentation. Upon locating themselves in the installation, and moving through it, the bodies superimpose with the projections, and cast shadows on the presentation.

Although this statement text does not provide the reader with any references or direct quotations; the authors and the pieces of written text that have been influential on my experience and interpretation of minibars are: George Bataille's notion of transgression and Michel Foucault's interpretation of it; Henri Lefebvre's seminal text "The Production of Space"; Bernard Tschumi's early essay on architecture and transgression; the work of Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, and the Strangely Familiar group. I must also acknowledge the work of Gil M Doron, which I have encountered far later than I was set out for the project on minibars and in a wider sense on architecture and transgression.

This text is partially derived from the interview conducted by Erden Kosova, published in "Becoming a Place" a publication Projekt - Istanbul Contemporary Art Museum, 2001.