



Katerina Gregos on David Polzin

on the occasion of the show "The Space Free of History" at Galerie Waldburger, 2010

David Polzin's work investigates the usage of architecture, its social function and the psychological effects that architecture exercises on the individual. With paper, cardboard and wood, Polzin builds up lo-fi architectural structures that can be entered and occupied. These edifices he often inhabits himself, sometimes concealing his presence, at other times being present and interacting with the viewer or directing the viewer's navigation in the space. A performative, interactive aspect pervades all his work.

Polzin is more concerned with the *function* of architecture, and the idea of architecture as a system that is deployed to facilitate, regulate and control our lives. By extent he is also concerned with questions of authority and *social control* in architecture, and how architecture determines or highlights the often imperceptible networks that affect how we live, work and interact on a daily basis. In a sense the maxim "we shape buildings and buildings shape us", can be said to underlie all of his practice to date, a practice which seeks to expose the behavioural modes conditioned by different forms of architecture and their influence on social interaction. Without limiting his investigation into the form, function or structure of architecture alone, and by inserting a performative dimension into his practice, Polzin explores different facets of the architectural, with a view to highlighting the rituals accompanying our use of buildings, the psychological impact the layout of a building has on its occupants, and the power it therefore exerts on individuals. Though he does not start out from an overt political position, one could say he is interested in the political *implications* of architecture, i.e. the politics that underlies the realisation of many forms of architecture, especially those of public usage.

With very simple, economical materials (paper, cardboard, wood, glue) Polzin builds up these site-specific, interactive installations, which despite their makeshift, ephemeral quality possess a quasi-institutional, quasi-authoritarian quality. In *Bonn 1*, for example, the visitor had to surrender his or her identity card or passport in order to obtain a ticket which would then allow access to the space that Polzin had built; once inside one had to go through a series of motions conceived by the artist – who was hidden within the space and could actually see the viewer without he himself being seen – in order to experience the 'work'; the artist thus controlled not only the entry into but also the navigation of the space right down to the visitor's exit. Within the space itself, a dialogue between the artist and the viewer was also instigated. This dialogue is one of the fundamental aspects of Polzin's practice, which aims to challenge the viewer's passive role when confronting a work of art as well as to

incite a further consideration of our experience of space. The dialogue in this case related to a small object in a display cabinet that the viewer was confronted with at the end of the *parcours*, described as a part of the biblical "burning thornbush", and the presence of which engendered a conversation about how societies deal with relics or other objects that possess an attributed significance or strong sense of symbolism. In *Velten 1*, on the other hand, Polzin set up an artificial border control thus prompting questions about forbidden spaces, borders, immigration, and security. In a sense these spaces may recall politically charged structures but through a decidedly 'apolitical' perspective, one which avoids articulating overt political stances or biased sentiments.

For his solo exhibition at Galerie Waldburger, Polzin will create a new site-specific installation especially for the gallery, which he will also inhabit for the first part of the exhibition (until February 27, 2010). In comparison with his earlier installations where he remained mostly hidden within his work, the situation he sets up here is more of a direct confrontation; the visitor will enter a specially designed space that will place him or her in a position where there is a direct encounter with the artist who will subsequently instigate a conversation in relation to the space that he and the viewer temporarily share. The resulting dialogue is not predetermined but will vary depending on the visitor's reactions. The idea underlying the installation rests on a challenge the artist has set himself: is it possible and if so how can one build a space that is free of history? What materials can be used to articulate this space free of history? And how can this space be described, this idea be conveyed to the spectator without actually having to *build* this space – to construct it *physically* - but with language as the only tool? In effect, this is an impossible task as even the materials used to build a space have their own history, that of manufacturing and of their own history of production. But what if it were possible to *imagine* this space? And how, then, could this space be communicated? Polzin thus embarks on an experiment that, as with all his work, directly implicates the viewers: in fact actually depends on them in order to be complete.

The challenge for the artist lies in attempting to create an image of this 'space free of history' without resorting to actual representation. The challenge for the viewer is to transcend the physical boundaries constructed by the artist and to be able to create an image of the space that doesn't exist in physical terms. The sole function of the existing architecture, in this case, is as a mildly dominating, enclosing and immersive structure that facilitates a performative situation, in this case the 'description' of this 'space without history' – a space that, for the moment, exists only in the artist's head. The architecture that Polzin has constructed within the gallery space therefore functions solely as a transit space or laboratory. In that sense, Polzin is first and foremost concerned with engendering a *situation*, and then interested in the formal parameters and physical properties of architecture itself. The whole experiment plays on the notion of three possible spaces: the real existing one within the gallery, the mental space in which the work is conceived in, and the possible space that may be born in the viewer's imagination. If we are actually able to imagine a space 'free of history', we may be able to reflect on a whole host of questions about history itself.

Katerina Gregos, Brussels, January 2010