Masters Research /Design 2018-19
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Security in Public Life and the Workplace

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Security devices and protocols are ubiquitous. Whether we are enduring the relative benefits of TSA Pre-check or the habitual swipe of our identity card, spatial thresholds in contemporary life are conceived to segregate people into categories based on organizational affiliation and level of perceived risk. The result is the atomization of public life into a bewildering range of categories and sub-categories. Today, Giambattista Nolli’s 1748 map of Rome, celebrated by urban designers as a pure manifestation of the distinction between public and private life, would require fifty shades of grey. One can imagine a map of an international airport with different tones representing airline employees and security personnel with different levels of security clearance, police from different jurisdictions, the un-ticketed and ticketed, citizens and non-citizens, and members of airline awards programs with different tiers of membership.

It is within this broader context that the issue of security will be explored. Not simply as a technical and procedural problem, as emphasized by security consultants, the police, and public agencies, but as a way to elaborate and prolong spatial thresholds, maintain order (and control), and effect psychological states. Significantly, these are spatial and experiential design considerations that point to fundamental disciplinary questions. As a result, the strategies and techniques of urban design, interior design, experience design, and information design will be utilized to expand the boundaries of the subject.

The fall studio will be organized into three sections to ensure that the full range of issues are explored. The first will focus on the cultural, political, and technical history of thresholds in order to tie the issue of security to fundamental architectural questions. The second will look at the issue of security through the lens of modern and contemporary culture. Our sources will include novels, films, works of architectural, and other cultural artifacts where security thresholds are a major protagonist. The last section of the semester, we will focus the security devices and protocols that shape so much of contemporary life, but with a nuanced and critical eye as a result of our deep dive into the larger cultural and political implications of our current dilemma. Our research and discussions will focus on a transect that spans from the city-controlled public realm of streets and parks, to publicly accessible corporate campuses, to multi-tenant office buildings, to specific tenants, to specific divisions within a company.

Each section of the semester will include group student work and a concluding symposium that will bring together a diverse group of academics and thought-leaders to discuss the deeper implications of the studio’s work. Potential guests security consultants, public officials, tech industry thought-leaders, novelists, philosophers, experience designers, architects, interior designers, and academics in the field. The class will compile its research and speculative thinking during the course of the semester and publish a book before the end of the term.