

Miri Segal

Artist Statement

February 2022

Many of my works use video. However, I do not see myself as a video artist. The medium of my work is the projection; not the video itself, but the projected image. I try to decipher the unique logic of this medium. The projector resembles the eye: an optical double cone (the Euclidean model) and a lens in its centre, but the light's direction is reversed. Instead of light coming from the outside and forming a retinal image inside the eye, the light comes from inside the device, projecting the inner image onto the outside world. The same type of reversal occurs with psychological projection: "he hates me" replaces "I hate him". The Solipsistic approach – stating that everything in the external world is merely a projection of one's own perceptions – suggests that projection has a blinding potential, but it is also responsible for our ability to sympathize ("I know you are in pain when you hit your elbow"). To me, this is the mechanism that establishes Fantasy – from the projector to the screen and from the screen to the structure of passion – and establishes the manner in which images live inside us. Using projections, mirror effects and physical experimentation I attempt to construct staged spaces at times suffused with sensualities and at others with discomfort. The projection allows me to place the viewer's body at the heart of the field of projection. For example in *Downcast, Autumn Dale* (2004), a puddle of water acts as a screen; *Beam From Between Your Eyes* (2008) is a projection stretched out at an angle, forming an anamorphosis which can only be seen properly from a single point of the room.

In the classic understanding of sculpture, the viewer is a neutral eye floating in space. However, when video works first came out in the 70's, their basic assumption was the contrary: the viewer had a body, and this body was placed in the exhibition

space in relation to the image or sculpture. The first Video works set out to amplify the viewer's awareness of her own body and of the circumstances of seeing art, to the extent that at times the works were embarrassing for the viewer, and the work and its viewing became politicized.

In my works, strangely, almost the opposite happens regarding the body. In "**Place de la bonne heure**" (2005), for instance, the viewer - a single viewer in the gallery space - sits on a rotating chair with a projector attached to its top, right above the viewer's head. The viewer revolves together with the image. He surrenders his body, and in return sees things through my eyes. The image travels around all four walls, disintegrated from the architecture of the room. Viewing the film while rotating turns out to be quite physical and it imposes upon the viewer the awareness that the image is a sheer projection. The work deals with political projection – of a circus or a square, for instance – onto the public sphere. The two circuses which appear in the work, one in Tel Aviv – "**The Beautiful Hours circus**" - and the other in Kalandia Checkpoint on the way to Ramallah, have both been artificially and inorganically planted in the public space, forced upon it. The film travels between them. The video ends with an image of a horseback rider shooting the sun and exploding it. The projection then stops, and the chair comes to a halt. The image of the sun bursting transfers from the screen and affects the reality in the gallery. "Place de la Bonne Heure" attempts to transfer the subjective sensation of political stagnation, onto the viewer's physical space through this audio-visual journey.

Several of my works aim to subvert the "natural perspective" that is determined by the viewer's location in his body and his physical location in space, time, and the political context. I use physical, optical, and conceptual manipulations that invade the viewer's consciousness, these manipulations serve as a starting point for the exploration of existence and being. Ghosts, shadows without bodies, purgatorium as a space between life and death, serve as basic figures in my work. Many of my works combine new media (electronics, motors, programming, video).

In 2013 I created a joint work with Gideon Gechtman, five years after his death. I met Gideon Gechtman 10 years earlier in 2003 at The International Installation Triennale in Haifa where we both participated. I discussed with him a previous work of mine - **Foreshadowing (2001)**, which was presented in 2001 at MoMA PS1 - in New York. The central element of that work was an image of a rotating roulette, focusing the viewer's attention onto its centre. Even before the roulette stopped, the results of its rotation flickered on the screen, thus transforming the 'fortune machine' into a foretold mechanism. The image of the roulette was screened on a tilted mirror, enabling the viewer's reflection to vaguely appear within it; simultaneously, the spectator cast a shadow on the floor. Alongside that shadow, another shadow, without a body, suddenly appeared on the floor, creating an illusion of an additional presence in the room. The second shadow, also reflected in the mirror, created a sense of invasion into the viewer's consciousness - a ghost standing in the room and watching over the spectator's shoulder.

My encounter with Gechtman led to a friendship and the possibility of creating a mutual work. Our general idea was to create a new work, placing an actual roulette at the centre, with a manipulated mechanism so that we could influence the results of the fall of the ball. The joint work did not materialize until Gechtman's death. Following a conversation with exhibition curator Avi Lubin, I decided to create a work in the format of a strange collaboration. The work's title is ***Neverfall***. Like the original idea of Gideon and myself, the mechanism of the roulette was manipulated (using a hidden electromagnetic system), but the nature of this manipulation is different. The ball and the roulette are frozen in movement - the roulette is constantly moving in one direction while the ball moves in an opposite one. It is an actual freeze during which the object transcends beyond a simple existence, exceeding the rules of time and space. Instead of dealing with fate, fortune, determinism and the freedom of choice- the roulette embodies all of these within an object, enabling time, such as death, to appear in space as a presence.

In my work, Perhaps the most significant example of ghostliness and viewers' manipulation, a work that almost forces viewers into a specific position, at its locus, is the media installation "**Cursed Spirits**" (2018). In this work, viewers were invited to enter a darkened space, to watch a theatrical performance projected in front of them, but rather than the usual projection where we sit comfortably and watch in the dark, here the viewers find their own reflections on the screen. They are captured in real-time through a camera eye and become an integral part of what happens on screen. Their presence acquires a dimension equivalent to the actors. The show, which at times seems to be still in rehearsal and improvisation stages, is a reflexive work that refers to the act of art itself, the relationship between the actors is vulgar and violent and the viewers who are now participants find themselves implicated in the play. The image has a pale, unnatural quality that conjures up a ghostly presence. The questions of responsibility and agency of the viewer are thus provoked from within the dream of ghostliness. The work is in the format of a play within a play, it was written in collaboration with Yoni Niv. The inner play is an interjection into three "lessons"; - Episodes from the play "Ahmed the Philosopher" By the French philosopher, Alan Badiou.

During the last twenty years, I have been drawing upon my mathematics background (I have a PhD from the Hebrew University in mathematics) to develop the technical parts of many of my works, including for example the software development for Cursed Spirits, Some of the projects I am currently working on go even further in this cross disciplinary attitude; Recently, I was commissioned for a large project in Ben-Gurion House. My proposal is a ghostly installation using a new AI algorithm I am developing. The work deals with questions relating to indoctrination and it is doing so via the viewer's body which embodies the character of Ben Gurion.