



Gillian McIver $C_8H_{10}N_4O_2$ / $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$ (Caffeine and Sugar)

Every workplace has some kind of space, no matter how tiny, where workers can go to buy or make a cup of tea or coffee. This space is psychologically separate from the workplace, where the worker can enjoy a respite. Once there, the back relaxes, the frown diminishes, one turns to the next person and exchanges some humdrum pleasantries which has nothing to do with the job. During the course of the day, many cups are consumed each representing not so much the desire for beverages, but the desire to escape the constricting environment of the workplace. The main feature of the drinks habitually consumed in the workplace is that they are very potent: loaded with caffeine (and often sugar). In many cases, it is coffee – brewed, instant or even espresso – which fuels the day's labours.

But the best reward for the daily labour is to escape from it, so $C_8H_{10}N_4O_2$ / $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$ (Caffeine and Sugar) is a homage to the coffee break, presenting the coffee break as a kind of glimpse of heaven in contrast to the driven atmosphere of the workplace.

The installation was made from everyday materials rather than "art" materials: a metal serving table, Styrofoam cups, sugar packets, coffee, coffee cans, plastic spoons, and shiny white gloss-painted wooden boards to give it structure. In contrast to the rough, grimy conditions in the factory space, the installation was pristine, clean, silver and white, and the room lit by a strong golden light. The smell of the coffee which filled the cups and piled on the floor gave a heady aroma which filtered throughout the factory, so one could smell it faintly when entering and as one came closer the room where the installation was, it became stronger. Inside the room the smell was so strong as to be overwhelming.

The installation consisted of a sculpture in the middle of the room, made from a shiny chrome serving table laid on its side, from which rose a "castle" kind of shape made from white cups glued together. The cups were filled with coffee, packets of sugar and plastic spoons. A short "wall" of coffee cans lined the perimeter of the room. There were some 250 of the cans, which were collected by another artist and donated to the project. A small sound player outside the room fed a faint "white noise" sound vaguely suggesting boiling water, into the room. To the side of the main sculpture was a small table made from cups and painted wood, on which sat a tower of cups, and a large jar of Nescafe – the most internationally recognised brand. Nearby was a plain worker's flask purchased in the local flea market for one Euro: on it was glued and varnished a photograph of a section of graffiti found in Paris: a picture of Guy Debord and the words "A Bas de Travail" ("Fuck Work").

The flask was filled with cold water to give it weight and put it on the floor. But nobody was prepared for what began to happen when visitors arrived to the exhibition. At the vernissage, one visitor to the room was visibly affected by the aroma: after a few minutes he took a cup from the tower on the small table and made himself a cup of coffee using the Nescafe, sugar and cold water! This happened several times in the course of the exhibition.

The unexpected interactivity of the installation reinforced the observation of the addictive nature of caffeine and its role in daily life, especially in the workplace. In this way the "heavenly" escape of the coffee castle started to look much more sinister.

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