

Trading between
Architecture and Art

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vis-à-vis
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Trading between Architecture and Art

Strategies and Practices of Exchange

Studies in Art and Architecture

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The Terms of Trade of Architecture and Art

Wouter Davidts, Susan Holden,
Ashley Paine

An artist appears in a photograph. On the pavement of 52nd Street in New York, just around the corner from the Museum of Modern Art, he is balancing a makeshift tower on his left hand, not unlike a circus juggler. The tower, made of eighteen square plates supported by drinking glasses at the four corners, resonates with the assorted skyscrapers that flank both sides of the Manhattan street. Anxious but determined, the artist keeps control of the precarious construction, bending his knees slightly. Passers-by seem unconcerned and pay no attention, while the artist, Job Koelewijn, remains deeply engrossed in his own perilous pursuit. We do not know what happens next.¹

Koelewijn performed his *A Balancing Act* in 1998, during a long-term artist's residency at PS1. The work gives expression to the uncertainty the artist experienced during his time in New York, intimidated by both the scale and intensity of the city. Steadying the delicate edifice on the palm of his hand, the work points to Koelewijn's daily efforts to hold his ground as an artist, while maintaining a balance between private possibilities and public demands. Here,



1 Job Koelewijn, *A Balancing Act*, 1998, photograph.



2 Job Koelewijn, *Cleaning of the Rietveld Paviljoen*; performance at the Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam.



Job Koelewijn, *Real Fiction Cinema*, 2010–12, various sites in Switzerland.

architecture serves as a means to reflect on the fate of the artist, and becomes a medium of self-reflection. Koelewijn's work is demonstrative of just some of the ways in which architecture, building, and the city have become materials for art today.² That is, for Koelewijn and many of his contemporaries, architecture is not so much a subject, but a vehicle for practice—a means through which to mobilize thoughts and articulate ideas.

In this light, art and architecture can be seen coming together not in new hybrid or amalgam forms, but as taking part in a process of trade and exchange that, like Koelewijn's own balancing act, produces particular and often unstable scenarios with unpredictable outcomes. Indeed, it is this exchange of disciplinary concepts and tools that establishes the dynamic scene in which art and architecture meet, intersect, clash or pull away. On this veritable trading floor of culture, artists and architects negotiate that which is of value or at stake: transactions that add up to the 'terms of trade' for architecture and art today. And, in much the same way as a nation's economic terms of trade provide a measure of future financial prospects—not to mention something of the very character of those nations, defined by that which is imported and exported—interrogating the trade between art and architecture can offer unique insights into the opportunities and potentials of contemporary practice.

This practice of trade begins largely in the 1960s, a time marked by many radical and canonical exchanges between artists and architects. Artists took on the conventions, language, and scale of architecture as an integral part of their work, utilizing plans and models, building structures and pavilions, or intervening in urban and public spaces, as a way of critiquing the traditional terms and limits of art. With a similar intensity, architects adopted strategies from the visual

arts, planting ‘artistic’ installations in art galleries, making exhibitions, and joining biennales and art events. Through such explorations, architects attempted to break free from functionalist and formalist conventions. Art galleries and museums became accomplices in this trafficking and, by bringing together exemplary practices from both sides of the venture, have redefined the role of the institution in staging and administering disciplinary difference. Since then, architecture and art have become robust trading partners with a great richness and diversity of interaction. Whereas architecture has become a commonplace instrument for artistic research and production, art has in turn offered a rich source for theoretical and formal expansion in architecture. Moreover, many of the resulting projects purposefully suspend the traditional distinctions drawn between the respective disciplines. As Anthony Vidler has argued, such works confront us with a remarkable challenge: ‘This intersection has engendered a kind of “intermediary art”, comprised of objects that, while situated ostensibly in one practice, require the interpretive terms of another for their explication.’³ Hence, as artists and architects exchange means and strategies, the inherited theoretical frames of reference, and our critical vocabularies to describe them, increasingly fall short. In particular, there is a tendency to characterize this proliferation of practices and projects as an ever-expanding field.⁴ However, such generalized summations tell us little about the nature of the field itself, its points of intensity and unevenness, or of the specific contests and traits such practices and projects deploy: those *frictions* that disciplinary distinctions—like differences between close friends—entail.

This book *Trading between Architecture and Art* contends with the complexity of those dealings between architecture

³ Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), viii.

⁴ The main historical reference for this discussion is Rosalind Krauss’ seminal essay ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’ (in: *October* 8 (Spring 1979), pp. 30–44) which continues to shape present day discussions. See for example: Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose, *Retracing the Expanded Field: Encounters Between Art and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014); Ila Berman and Douglas Burnham, *Expanded Field: Architectural Installation Beyond Art* (Novato, CA: AR+D Publishing, 2016).

5 Hal Foster, in Julian Rose et al., 'Trading Spaces: A Roundtable on Art and Architecture', *Artforum International* 51, no. 2 (2012), p. 201.

and art, exploring how such transactions have shaped, and at times dislodged, our faith in disciplinary concepts and categories. Indeed, it aims to interrogate the terms and conditions of exchange, and what is at stake in the idea of disciplinary difference, historically and in the present. To this end, the book proceeds via concrete cases. Each contribution focuses on a specific instance of the two-way transaction between architecture and art: artists adopting architectural means on the one hand, and architects adopting artistic strategies on the other. Each essay is conceived as an in-depth examination of those situations where traditional distinctions and disciplinary conventions become interestingly opaque, and meanings provocatively uncertain.

We argue that to start from the cases themselves, on their own terms, is paramount to this endeavor. As such, the general aim of this book is not to approach the cases with pre-established principles and set schemes, but to try to distill original insights from the chosen works as they present themselves to us. As a result, the cases are wide-ranging: some are iconic, others relatively obscure. Certainly, they make an idiosyncratic constellation in the expanding field of practices, spanning a period from the 1930s to the present, albeit with telling concentrations around the 1990s and in the 2000s. Again, this is not meant to propagate the notion of a pluralist fusion that has haunted the exchange between architecture and art ever since the advent of postmodernism. On the contrary, this book is driven by the thought that the most interesting cases in the past decades surpass the historical dream of a symbiosis between both disciplines. Most if not all of the cases discussed in this book pertain to projects within which the differences between architecture and art are put at stake: distinctions here are regarded as generative, rather than as problems to be solved.⁵ The works examined also reveal that

the trade between architecture and art is rarely reciprocal. Rather, it is fundamentally uneven, and frequently unstable.

⁶ Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), xii.

In granting these objects—whether artifacts, projects or events—pride of place, we lean heavily on Yve-Alain Bois' diatribe against what he terms theoreticism:

In fact, the first lesson to be learned from one of the theoreticians most likely to be invoked by theoreticians, Roland Barthes, is that one does not 'apply' a theory; that concepts must be forged *from* the object of one's inquiry or imported *according to* that object's specific exigency; and that the main theoretical act is to define this object, not the other way around.⁶

In many academic spheres today, a truly detailed reading of the actuality and specificity of artifacts has become rare. The prevailing urge to jump straight to the 'meaning' of a work makes many miss the critical resonance that a sincere reading might proffer. To this end, each essay in this book begins with a description of its object of scrutiny, whether it is an art exhibition, a pavilion, an installation, a scale model, or a set of collages. Indeed, the variety of these objects, and the singularity of the essays—both written and visual—is key to the conception of the collection. This idea is reinforced by the table of contents wherein all the contributions are listed without hierarchy, headings or other imposed structural articulations—not unlike an old-fashioned mixtape.

Still, in the great variety and richness of examples, some specific insights are revealed by this focused examination of architecture and art's terms of trade—insights that emerge across and between individual essays. For example, the notion of utility is recognizable as a recurrent topic for a number of authors and artists. Once invoked to draw a line

⁷ Maarten Lefooghe, 'On the Art/Architecture of Reframing an Industrial Site: Rotor's "Grindbakken" Exhibition', see pp. 207ff.

between disciplines (architecture has routinely been described as just 'sculpture with plumbing'), utility is exposed here as a more complex, sometimes spurious, but often unavoidable *topos* of contemporary practice, which plays out through the various social, formal, and aesthetic dimensions of both architecture and art. It also complicates the repertoire of how art and architecture are increasingly accounted for and valued in administrative and institutional settings. Ambiguity also arises in relation to the changing institutional and physical contexts of exhibition and display, and a number of contributions to the book examine episodes in the recent resurgence of interest in exhibitions of architecture, whether used as a means to frame and represent specific works and practices, or to create novel works or bodies of original research in their own right. In this context, architecture can be seen as reclaiming ground, in both a literal and metaphorical sense, within and beyond the institutions of art. Tellingly, issues such as utility and display can be seen as some of the common denominators of art and architectural practice today—the very currency of their trade. They are, after all, the kind of concepts and practices that, as one of the authors in this book insists, 'have no disciplinary home base'.⁷ As a compendium, *Trading between Architecture and Art* aims to enrich an understanding of the potential openings, and possible deadlocks, of such exchanges—to articulate in a specific way what is contested and what is transformed, as means and strategies are displaced, concepts shared, and contexts appropriated. On purpose it abstains from presenting an overarching theory, or an all-embracing diagram that is intended to map, define, or eventually retrace the expanded field of art and architecture as if it were a contiguous whole. It avoids this task in favor of a lively discussion of the terms of such trade. In the end we find that the question of whether a

project is either art or non-art, architecture or non-architecture, is not as illuminating as the pattern of disciplinary rivalries that become apparent through an examination of specific cases. The interest, we might say, lies less in how means and strategies mobilize disciplines than the other way around: how disciplinarity is articulated by the contest of concepts and through the trading of practices.

As this book shows, the terms of trade of architecture and art are necessarily worked through in practice, and on a case-by-case basis. Incidentally, in the particularity of this collection of focused studies, we are reminded of another work by Job Koelewijn—a giant wooden stamp made in 2003.⁸ With Vicks Vaporub, an ointment rubbed onto children's chests to cure them of a cough, one can imprint a giant text on the wall of a gallery or art institution. Retrospectively the text serves as a leitmotif, or catchphrase, for every contribution: it reads, 'Be More Specific'.



8 Job Koelewijn, *Untitled (Be More Specific)*, 2003.

A b o u t t h e A u t h o r s

Angelique Campens (b. 1980) is an independent art historian, writer, educator, and curator whose research focuses on sculptural concrete, interactions between sculpture and architecture in the twentieth and twenty-first century, and the integration of sculpture in public space. Born in Belgium, she has worked for international museums and public art spaces. She teaches at KASK Ghent and is a PhD candidate in art history. In 2010 she published her first monograph about the architecture of the Belgian Modernist Juliaan Lampens. Campens lives and works in both Turin, Italy and Brussels, Belgium.

Guy Léon Châtel (b. 1956) is an Engineer Architect, Associate Professor at Ghent University, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, and principal of Labo A conducting applied research on design-oriented issues. He publishes on architecture and art (A+, Janus, DW&B, AS, MDD, *Architectural Review Flanders*, *Cahiers Thématisques AVH-F*, *Interstices*, *Oase*, *San Rocco*, *EspaceTemps.net*). Books include *Luc Deleu – T.O.P office: Orban Space*

(co-edited with Wouter Davidts and Stefaan Vervoort, 2012) and *The School as Design Assignment: School Architecture in Flanders 1995–2005* (co-authored with Maarten Van Den Driessche, Bart Verschaffel et al., 2006). Châtel lives and works in Ghent, Belgium.

Wouter Davidts (b. 1974) is partner investigator of the ARC funded project 'Is Architecture Art?' and teaches at the Department of Architecture & Urban Planning and the Department of Art, Music and Theatre Studies, Ghent University. He has published widely on the museum, contemporary art, and architecture, including *Triple Bond* (2017), *Luc Deleu – T.O.P. office: Orban Space* (co-edited with Stefaan Vervoort and Guy Châtel, 2012) and *The Fall of the Studio* (2009). With Mihnea Mircan and Philip Metten he curated 'The Corner Show', Extra City Antwerp, 2015. Davidts lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium.

Mark Dorrian (b. 1964) holds the Forbes Chair in Architecture at the University of Edinburgh and is Co-Director of Metis, an atelier for art and architecture. His research spans topics in architecture and urbanism, cultural history, landscape studies, media theory and visual culture, and his writing has appeared in key international journals in these fields. Books include *Writing on The Image: Architecture, the City and the Politics of Representation* (2015) and *Seeing from Above: The Aerial View in Visual Culture* (co-edited with Frédéric Pousin, 2013). He is currently working on the history of sketchbooks. Dorrian lives and works in Edinburgh, United Kingdom.

Susan Holden (b. 1976) is an architect and Senior Lecturer at the University of Queensland. Her research deals broadly

with historical and theoretic aspects of architecture as a subject of culture. Her research on architecture and art has considered historical cases from the post-wwII synthesis of the arts and the competition to design the Centre Pompidou to contemporary developments in practice including the proliferation of pavilion architecture. She has published in a range of journals including *Journal of Architecture*, *Leonardo* and *AA Files*, and contributes to the professional journal *Architecture Australia*. Holden lives and works in Brisbane, Australia.

John Körmeling (b. 1951) studied architecture at the Technische Hogeschool in Eindhoven. His projects and realizations range from visual art, architecture, urban and rural planning to design. In 2010 Körmeling designed the Dutch Pavilion for the World Expo in Shanghai (CN), entitled 'Happy Street'. The pavilion consisted of 26 elevated small buildings, designed after various Dutch architectural styles, along a main pedestrian strip that curved in a figure eight. Each house was a mini pavilion in itself, exploring themes such as energy, water, space, and other urban issues to achieve a 'Better City, Better Life'. He lives and works in Eindhoven, the Netherlands.

Maarten Liegooghe (b. 1983) is Assistant Professor in architectural history and theory at Ghent University. His research revolves around encounters between art, architecture, and exhibition and preservation practices. Liegooghe graduated in architecture and engineering in 2006 at Ghent University and TU Berlin. His dissertation, *The Monographic Factor* (2013), studied the ideology underlying single-artist museums and their institutional and architectural hybridity in between art museums, archives, and an

individual's memorial. He studies contemporary architectural exhibitions as an experimental field in which 1:1 and in situ exhibits formulate alternative approaches to key problems in historic preservation. Liegooghe lives and works in Ghent, Belgium.

Mark Linder (b. 1960) is a Professor at Syracuse University where he was also Chancellor's Fellow in the Humanities. He has taught at the University of Michigan, Harvard, University of Illinois–Chicago, Rice, IIT, RISD, and UCLA. He wrote *Nothing Less than Literal: Architecture after Minimalism* (2004) and is completing *That's Brutal, What's Modern?* which argues that the intellectual formation and design practices of the New Brutalism are instances of modern architecture coming to terms with the transdisciplinary question, 'What would architectural practice become if imaging were its acknowledged means and ends?' Linder lives and works in Syracuse, United States.

John Macarthur (b. 1958) is Professor of Architecture at the University of Queensland where he teaches history, theory, and design. He is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities and a Fellow of the Queensland Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was the founding Director of the Research Centre for Architecture, Theory, Criticism and History and remains an active member of the Centre. His research on the intellectual history of architecture has focused on the conceptual framework of the relation of architecture and the visual arts from the Picturesque to the present. Macarthur lives and works in Brisbane, Australia.

Philip Metten (b. 1977) is an artist who freely moves between the respective media and regimes of sculpture and

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Sarah Oppenheimer (b. 1972) is an artist whose work explores the built environment as an orchestrated field of stasis and change. Oppenheimer is a Senior Critic at the Yale University School of Art. Recent solo exhibitions include 's-399390', Mudam Luxembourg, 2016, 's-281913' at Pérez Art Museum Miami, 2016 and 's-337473' at Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, 2017. Oppenheimer lives and works in New York City, United States.

Ashley Paine (b. 1979) is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Queensland. His recent research and publications have examined topics as diverse as the history of striped façades, the collection and reconstruction of architecture in museums, contemporary pavilions, and the posthumously built works of Frank Lloyd Wright. He has contributed to journals including *AA Files*, *ARQ*, *The Architectural Review*, and *Interstices*, and is co-author of the book *Pavilion Proposition: Nine Points on an Architectural Phenomenon*. Paine is also a practicing architect, and co-founder of the Brisbane-based practice PHAB Architects. Paine lives and works in Brisbane, Australia.

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Annalise Varghese (b. 1992) is a PhD candidate at the University of Queensland and part of the ARC funded project 'Is Architecture Art? A history of categories, concepts and recent practises.' Her research orbits conceptual architectural practices, with regard to the architectural pavilion and its rising presence in the contemporary design sphere. Varghese explores the pavilion's indeterminate and shifting identity over time, as a form somewhere between art and architecture, with equal footing in physical and virtual domains—presenting and publishing her early research findings through international conferences: SAHANZ and AHRA in 2017. Varghese lives and works in Brisbane, Australia.

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Stephen Walker (b. 1966) is currently Head of Architecture at the University of Manchester. His research draws upon architectural and critical theory and examines the questions that theoretical projects can raise about particular moments of architectural and artistic practice. A developing methodology has brought together aspects of theory with a broad range of practical work including Mediaeval Breton architecture, ring-roads and the work of contemporary artists (in particular Gordon Matta-Clark, Helen Chadwick, about whom he has published widely, and more recently, Warren and Mosley). Walker lives in Sheffield and works in Manchester, United Kingdom.

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