#01#02#03

Aurélie Hachez
AHA
TU Delft (Netherlands)

Inner page spread of #01#02#03 with movable insert. Photography: Fabrice Schneider.

A mechanism that confers consistency and coherence to an architecture practice can be one that departs from architecture. This is not to say that such mechanisms outside one's discipline must be completely alien to that discipline. Think of a surgeon who makes wooden furniture to train his or her hand.

Architecture is the discipline of juggling between disciplines: engineering, building, economics, law, accounting, politics, sociology, psychology. What would this mechanism be for a practicing architect, something that is outside the discipline but not entirely alien to it? Producing an artwork might be an answer.

Even if for an architect the finality of work is building, detour must be taken for a reason. How can art and architecture cross-fertilize each other?

A speculative comparison between domestic architecture and conceptual art can be made. Domestic architecture defined by the condition of being a materialized and non-movable production, elaborated in the private realm can be considered as the very opposite of conceptual art, broadly marked by the notion of dematerialization as put forward by Lucy Lippard in her 1973 "The dematerialization of the Art object from 1966 to 1972". However, the common denominator between domestic architecture and conceptual art can be understood in how their specific characters make them inaccessible to the public. Quoting Kosuth's claim that conceptual artists act as theorists and operate merely among themselves contributes to the reputation of conceptual art as being inaccessible to the public – a stigma that is still very active today (Zonnenberg 2019).

Seth Siegelhaub, an independent curator that played a vital role in the emergence of conceptual art, declares in a "manifesto" interview that because the artwork is not visual in nature, it does not require the traditional means of exhibition, but a means that would present the intrinsic ideas of the artwork (Charles Harrison 1969). Following this idea, Ursula Meyer's 1972 publication Conceptual Art also states that the book has become an important new space to show art along with its (format of) presentation. This statement is relevant in the context of domestic architecture too, which can mostly be experienced by the owner and is explicitly related to the context in which and for whom it is developed.

Hence, the survival of this architecture is merely secured in the way it is documented.
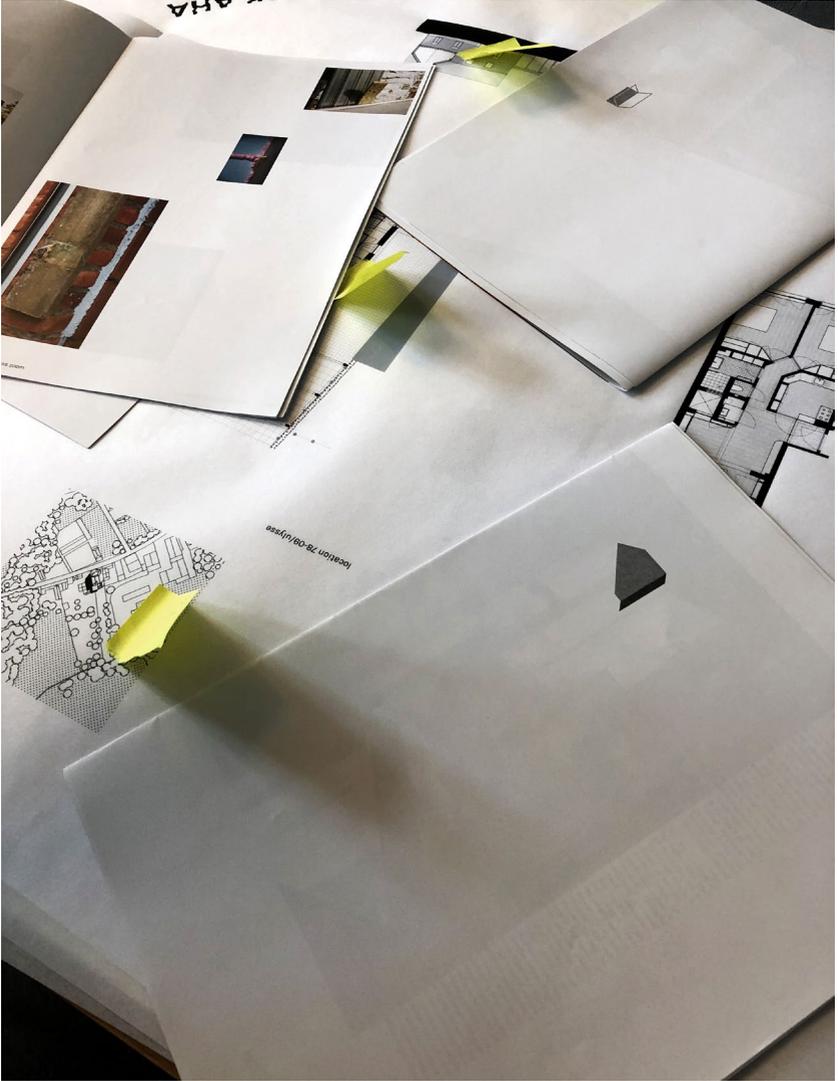
#01#02#03. Photography: Aurélie Hachez

Printing matters?

#01#02#03 [1] is an artist book made in 2019 as a collaboration between architect Aurélie Hachez and editor-designer Piero Bisello, that was presented in the exhibition CCP Import Wallonie Bruxelles–Export Barcelona 2019. Taking three architectural domestic projects as a starting point, the artist book was envisioned as a detour, challenging the typical architecture portfolio.

The pictures by fashion photographer Piotr Niepsuj were turned into foldable posters in #01#02#03. Photography: AHA

In architecture the presentation of a finished site often follows the tenet of transparency, that is to deliver the project as bare information to those who didn't experience it, providing the best simulacrum technology allows. Instead, this artist book wanted to reflect on the act of making architecture, exposing what occurs during the conception of projects rather than showing the projects themselves. In the same manner, conceptual artists like Lewitt or Robert Morris, conversely acted in a manner to "engage the mind of the viewer." (Kosuth 1968).

This attitude also reacts to the context of the exhibition, which was curated to establish a connection between two European cities, emphasizing the idiosyncrasies and the cultural background of the invited architectural practices.
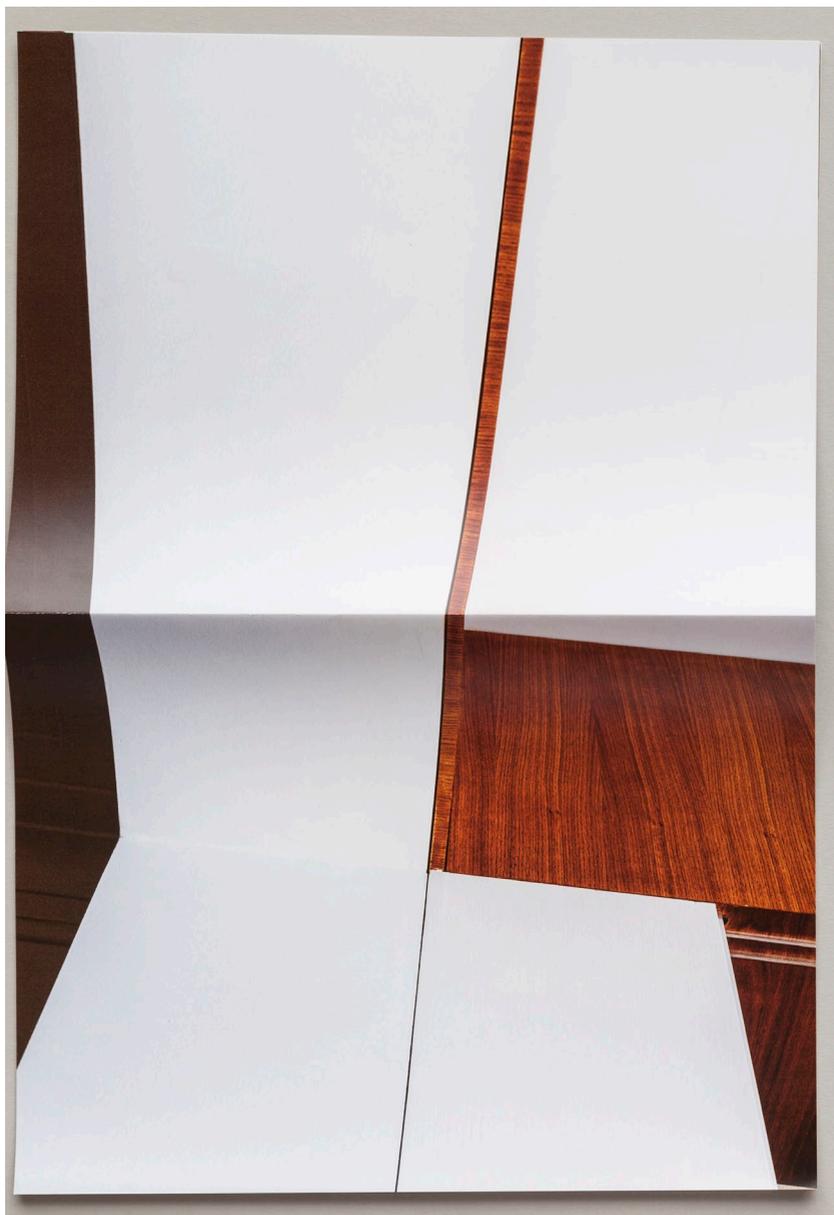
To do so, three architecture projects are documented in the artist book as three different booklets. Each of them is thought through individually with a custom layout, chosen to convey the design process of every project, their essence as well as their specific narration. Mediums are mixed, depicting projects more as spatial phenomena defined by objects, artifacts, and perceptions rather than by the bordering of interior architecture elements of walls, floor and ceiling.

For example, in the booklet l'Ermitage, the non orthogonal close-ups displayed as unbounded posters only suggest the very refined furniture, emphasizing an aesthetic specificity rather than revealing it in full. On the contrary, for the Ulysse booklet the large pictures made during the worksite phase depict the project as a concrete structure, brutally expressing itself in the Belgian rural landscape as a new ruin: no pictures but images of architectural processes.

Some additional documents are provided as inserts. Through them, the reader is given a second narration by asking to place these elements in specific parts of the booklets, thus activating an associative dimension. Again referring to the way of documenting conceptual art, this artist book resonates in the idea of Siegelaub about primary information, the format of this publication being considered as an accurate vehicle, a potential exhibition space in itself, making visible for a broader public the intrinsic designs of these 3 domestic projects.

#01#02#03, three architecture projects are documented in the artist book as three different booklets. Photography: Fabrice Schneider.

A detail of *L'Ermitage*, AHA's renovation of an art deco apartment in Brussels, The picture by fashion photographer Piotr Niepsuj was turned into foldable poster in #01#02#03.

i. materiality roughness zoom

Inner page spread of #01#02#03 with movable insert. Photography: Fabrice Schneider.

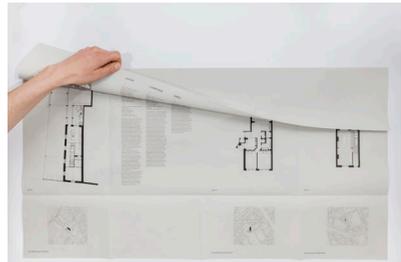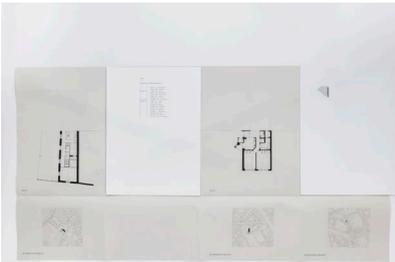Eventually, the three booklets are packed into a folded cover where all the pragmatic architectural graphic information is printed on the inside, which functions as an interpretation of the folded plans, the most banal architectural tool.

#01#02#03. Photography: Fabrice Schneider.

#01#02#03. Photography: Fabrice Schneider.

Another compelling aspect resides in how the making of the artist book could be seen as a "mise en abyme" for the designer. The reflection of the architect during the design and execution of her own projects is both reported and furthered in the artist book. The different medium of the printed matter serves as a vehicle for the information regarding a specific practice, as well as the excuse to research again on that practice. In this regard, the artwork becomes the result of this double reflection, which helps individuate the features of a specific architecture project through the side-effects and the concept of undesigning.

Side-Effects

As mentioned, the intention was to frustrate a traditional format of "transparent publication" where side-effects are often unwelcomed in the process. The challenge of making an artist book out of an architecture project falls within a separate category, that is the moment of addition to what's already done. Indeed, the process of looking back in detail at a past project prompts unexpected thoughts.

Through reflection and constrained by the parameters of the artistic medium of choice--in this case the printed matter, but also graphic design, literature, photography, found text--serendipitous findings are both common and precious. The resulting book presents possible answers to thought experiments. For example, one booklet might respond to the question of what a renovated Brussels house becomes when it is coupled with literature in the space of a page; another booklet delves into the issue of how the perception of a reconstructed Wallonian farm changes when it is presented in the form of an art catalogue for a performance.

Inner page spread of #01#02#03 dedicated to AHA's project *Oriel*, a renovated Brussels 20th century house. Photography: Fabrice Schneider.

Detail of #01#02#03 booklet dedicated to AHA's project Ulysse, the renovation of a Walloon farm. Photography: Fabrice Schneider.

These thought experiments were carried out during the making of #01#02#03, which can be now seen as an exploration of an architecture practice a posteriori, clarifying a specific attention to the role that side effects have within these processes.

Like the unexpected results happening within the composition of the pages, side effects here might be close to what Irenée Scalbert described through the concepts of chance and non-decisions. He analyzes them in his book on 6a architects titled Never Modern (Scalbert 2013), referring to unexpected events and unwanted signs emerging during the architecture-making process, embraced instead of being dismissed as mere disruptions of an original design.

In the project Oriel for example, concrete poetry reveals some architectural gestures such as *cuts* that were made on some of the interior designs. They express a subtle visual distortion that attests to a change of either form or materiality instead of trying to blend it into the new design. A metal plate, rupture attesting a change in levels of the stairs. Likewise, an amputated window, adapting to the new furniture as well as keeping the room's character.

Concrete poetry by Piero Bisello and amputated window detail of AHA's Oriel in #01#02#03.
Photography: AHA

Detail of AHA's Oriel in #01#02#03. Photography: AHA

Undesigning & Lengthening the Journey

Aldo Rossi compared projects to unfinished love affairs, saying they are most beautiful before they end. Working on #01#02#03 refers to this open-ended approach. For example, a Wallonian farm becomes again a sculpture rather than a house thanks to the layout of the page in which it is presented. The resulting booklet attests to the way in which the architecture was envisioned during its making, but also to the reactivation of this feature within the experience of the artist book.

This parallelism between the architecture practice and the making of #01#02#03 takes shape not so much as a visual identity but as a specific inclination instead, a stance that has to do with undesigning and a particular form of inefficiency.

Detail of AHA's project *Ulysse*, the renovation of a Walloon farm. The worksite seen as a sculpture. Photography: Delphine Mathy.

To clarify these terms, one can take the framework put in place by artist Leonard Koren, who talks about three metaphors regarding undesigning. More specifically, he applies three concepts to the making of baths in his book on the same topic (Koren 1996).

The first is the idea of discovery, which somehow coincides with serendipity, chance and the non-decisions mentioned above. His motto seems to be: "you don't design it, you find it." He compares the making of architecture to a mushroom hunt, where you don't know what you end up with. Mushrooms are not always easy to see even when they are right in front of you.

Details of *L'Ermitage*, AHA's renovation of an art deco apartment in Brussels.
Photography: Delphine Mathy.

The making of #01#02#03 and the architecture projects in it resembles this hunt. For exemple, a fireplace is modelled from a serendipitously found basement window, just like images of these two elements are chancely floating within the book.

Inner page spread of #01#02#03 with movable insert. Photography: Fabrice Schneider.

Secondly, Koren mentions the metaphor of "making nature" for the undesigner, which in his lingo stands for letting the context be present. In architecture, this metaphor translates into an attention to the vernacular and to the history of the place where you build. #01#02#03 touches upon these topics by including specific content. For example, passages from the history of early 20th century Brussels society and ways of living are coupled with the project of renovating a house from the same time and place a hundred years later. The painting "Le Balcon" by Edouard Manet illustrates how the noble spaces were uplifted on what is called Le Bel Étage, (literally the "beautiful floor"), which would open towards the street and the public activities. Images of the project conception show how the spatial system has been reversed to have the roomiest and brightest spaces on the backside, as today we tend to fold back into the private sphere.

above : Edouard Manet, Le Balcon, 1868, Musée D'Orsay.
left : Details of *Oriel*, AHA's renovation of a house in Brussels, Photography: Delphine Mathy.

Finally, Koren mentions poetry for the undesigner, a sense of simplicity, one that allows contradiction as a departure from conclusions that are too reasoned. #01#02#03 includes simply intuitive choices, artistic decisions that don't always need rational justification the same way scientific decisions do. Even if architecture must include science, it doesn't mean it must equate it.

An idea of inefficiency follows from the concept of undesigning. In economics, efficiency is defined as the greatest output through the smallest input. Given an architecture task like the renovation of a house, or even the making of an architecture portfolio, any constraint that reduces the ratio input/output is a form of inefficiency. Think of architecture details that don't add to the main purpose of a building, or using time to learn about the specificities of a site when anything could be built there, or slow printing techniques that give the same result as fast ones.

The process of making #01#02#03 can be seen as free and strained at once. Freedom comes from the openness of printing an architecture portfolio for an exhibition. Constraints come from responding to the task by choosing a more artistic approach for it.

#01#02#03. Photography: AHA

If the purpose of #01#02#03 is to show architecture projects on paper, such purpose is not necessarily attained by browsing archives, using experimental graphic design, slow printing techniques, etc. These constraints are put in place for the sake of adding something more to three finished projects and the books containing them. Just like in the case of undesigning, #01#02#03 shows how an artistic approach can mirror an architecture practice.

#01#02#03. Photography: Fabrice Scheinder

Clients can ask why they should take a detour and spend time brainstorming, why they should look at artworks when thinking about renovating their house, why they should care about history when their commission is today. These constraints can be and are seen as forms of inefficiency. Yet a longer journey can lead to a different destination, most likely a more fruitful one.

Inner spread of #01#02#03 dedicated to AHA' s project *Ulysse*, the renovation of a Walloon farm. Photography: Fabrice Schneider

What is the voice? What is the word? [2]

"*Syntax and language*, as well as the materiality of *manuscripts and books*, affect *what* is written as much as individual authorial style – for all its residues of the author's voice." (Hughes 2007)

The collaborative work on this artist book resonates in this paper with the "drowing method" described by Rolf Hughes, in the sense of a perspective research writing that departs from the typical structure of scientific literature. The research led by a creative process did not feature a specific question followed by the presentation of objective research findings trying to answer it. Conventional questions could have been: How is architecture enriched when it is put into an artistic perspective during the making process? Or, how can a publication enrich an architecture practice?

The chosen path is instead a hybrid genre, where results and answers are presented through experiential and sensory knowledge. What Hughes says about literature could be applied to the making of the artist book and the present paper too. He reminds us to seek greater imaginative and intellectual freedom while making greater demands on the tools and materials of our professions, so that we may persuasively communicate such freedom with others. (Hughes 2007)

Architecture might be the discipline of juggling between disciplines, among which there is art. The Artist book #01#02#03, shows how an architect can take the "art side" during the juggle, only to come back to the juggle enriched with extra keys to understand, situate and make an architecture practice coherent for itself and to the viewer.

A potato stamp for the cover of #01#02#03. Photography: AHA

Notes

1. The publication was realised with the great help of the AHA team composed of Francesco Sarao, Gautier Rey and Camille Paty.

2. The title refers to this passage from St. Augustine's *Confessions:* "The voice precedes the Word and it makes possible its understanding (...) What is the voice, what is the Word? Examine what happens in you and form your own questions and answers. This voice which merely resonates and offers no sense, this sound which comes from the mouth of someone screaming, not speaking, we call it the voice, not the word (...) but the word, if it is to earn its name, has to be endowed with sense and by offering the sound to the ear it offers at the same something else to intellect." As found in: Hughes, Rolf, 2007, "The Drowning Method", in Jane Rendell, Mark Dorrian, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser (eds.), Critical Architecture, New York, Routledge, pp. 92-93.

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