

This book presents an overview of the varied activities of Olivier Goethals – activities that involve constructing buildings, reorganizing interiors, making cupboards, staging exhibitions, drawing pictures, co-authoring editions, writing poems, sculpting objects, producing paintings, raising flags, designing scenographies, developing concepts, posting images, interviewing philosophers, organizing collaborations, connecting spaces, starting conversations, giving lectures, teaching students, implementing designs, devising constructions, programming gifs, filling notebooks, putting up walls, inspiring jewelers, turning on lights, mixing media, mounting installations and winning prizes.

Educated as an architect and as an urbanist, Goethals worked, between 2008 and 2016, for the office of De Vylder Vinck Taillieu. Simultaneously, however, he embarked on a kind of odyssey, alone but also joined by many others, to explore the age-old distinctions between art and architecture. Whether the latter is part of the former (and vice versa) has been a question that has been troubling architects and artists, as well as their critics, historians and theoreticians, for centuries. Some attempts at clear and absolute distinctions have been made. For the philosopher Georg W.F. Hegel, architecture was an art form, but a purely symbolic and abstract one, not capable of representation – the result of formal decisions, rather than of ideas or intellectual considerations. For Hegel, architecture wasn't allowed to be interesting, because then it would become something else: sculpture, or painting, or poetry.

Since the 19th century, and more intensively so since the 1960s, both the practice and the discourse on art and architecture can be seen as a collective breaching of all the rules imposed by Hegel, as in a chaotic game of football in which the referee has been murdered, but the game goes on, inside of the architecture of the stadium or the football field. Other positions have been staked; alternative definitions have been drawn up. According to Adolf Loos, architecture should please everyone, and can therefore only be considered truly artistic in the case of the monument or the tomb. According to Paul Valéry, music and architecture are the most related art forms, because they 'make us think of something quite other than themselves,' by creating environments in which people disappear, as it were, exactly by thinking of dreaming about something else. According to Roland Barthes, a building or a space – with the Eiffel Tower as an ultimate but impossible example – is one of many, many signs, as an invitation to be read, to be interpreted, understood and enjoyed. According to Manfredo Tafuri, architecture can do what art is not capable of, exactly because it deals with power – with dominating and structuring people's lives. According to Beatriz Colomina, art and architecture are both a form of media that exist in order to become an image, that can subsequently be reproduced, published, sold and shared. And according to Peter Osborne, who defines architecture as the 'material organization of social space in the present at both conceptual and practical levels', increasingly large parts of contemporary art are being 'architecturalized'.

While this bombardment of ideas on architecture and art goes on, leading to an even covered field of distinctions, suggestions, demarcations, categorizations and enclosures, Olivier Goethals likes to keep it simple, exactly in order to preserve and to celebrate the complexity of things. As the pages of this book indicate, one after the other, all of the above definitions contain at least some truth, no matter how small. The activities of Goethals present, therefore, a sort of liberated, positive dialectics – a painless tension in which art and architecture keep each other alive, no longer troubled by their identities or their histories, in a moment in time – ours – in which everything melts into air, no matter how hard some of us are continuously trying to prevent that.

On his business card, designed by Mathieu Serruys, Goethals has put his credo: *Play Sincerely!*, a concept borrowed from English philosopher Alan Watts, and indeed a phrase that not only summarizes his work, but that also promises to solve all those endless discussions about art and architecture. Goethals has said, in interviews, that a good space is a space that can immediately be enjoyed and appreciated by children, but conversely, browsing through this book and looking back on his work, it's also possible to think of what happens when a group of children takes over a space, and installs the kind of glorious chaos, the framed liberty that is typical of a kindergarten, just before noon.

What it's all about is to unlearn what you consider obvious, to erase those restrictions that seem natural, but that no one seems to have chosen for. It is a situation reminiscent of those timeless sentences by Rilke, part of his *Duino Elegies* from 1923 – mystical poems that are nevertheless modern, extremely light, promising and obvious. 'It's true,' Rilke writes, 'it's strange not living on earth anymore, not using customs you hardly learned, not giving the meaning of a human future to roses and other things that promise so much; no longer being what you used to be in hands that were always anxious, throwing out even your own name like a broken toy. It's strange not to wish your wishes anymore. Strange to see the old relationships now loosely fluttering in space.' That last sentence sums it up – this book is a collection of loose flutterings in space, since that is what Olivier Goethals accomplishes, project after project, while it is also, in a way, the most concise and open definition of existence one can think of: to flutter in space – isn't that what we all do, from the kindergarten until the day we die?

Christophe Van Gerrewey



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Acrylic, ink, pencil, oil stick on paper, 80 x 60 cm.