ART AND ARCHITECTURE:
FRONTIERS AND CONTACT SITUATIONS
IN THE WORK OF THE ARTIST FERNANDA FRAGATEIRO

Extended Abstract

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INTRODUCTION:

SUBJECT JUSTIFICATION AND GENERAL OBJECTIVES:

The subject and contents of this dissertation, conducted within the Masters of Architecture Program of the Technical University of Lisbon (I.S.T.), both arise from the crossing of two lines of thought. On the one hand, the long term fascination for the works of the artist Fernanda Fragateiro and the urge to explore her works through the various relationships it establishes with architecture. On the other hand, by the unsettlement caused by reading "Delirious New York", by Rem Koolhaas and the realization of a growing contradiction between the instability of the metropolis and the durability of architecture.

With that in mind, this dissertation will endorse an architecture that takes root in Peter Zumthor’s proposition in “Atmospheres” where the architect argues the importance of his work transmitting something more. Something besides the performance of its function, something special that can be felt by any user. The belief that these purposes can only be achieved by a close contact between art and architecture will put the collaborations in the center of this investigation.

The collaboration concept has in fact dominated the discussion of the relationship between art and architecture for the last 30 years. The actuality of the subject and its importance to the future of both fields is noticeable in various displays that focus on the matter. In Portugal, for instance, in the year 2000, was held the “Co-llaborations: Architects/Artists” exhibit, curated by Elba Benitez and Luís Enguita, in which was enclosed the collaboration between Fernanda Fragateiro and the landscape architect João Gomes da Silva for the project “Jardim das Ondas”. In 2012, inserted in Lisbon’s Architecture Trienal program, at the Nacional Museum of Contemporary Art – Museu do Chiado, was held the exhibition “Let’s talk about houses: When art speaks architecture”, curated by Delfim Sardo.

On an international level, the conferences and seminars worthy of note are, the 1997’s seminars held at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, with the subject “Art and Architecture”. Which had among it’s topics, vital subjects to the understanding of this concept, such as: “Transgressions: Crossing the lines of Art and Architecture”, “Frames of Mind” and “Fused”, all discussed in open forums by artists, architects and theorists. Also worthy of note are the seminars held on the 27º São Paulo’s Biennial, in 2006, with the subject “How to live together” and the subject of the Venice’s Biennial, in 2010, “People meet Architecture”.

Supported by this renovated interest on collaborations and the possibilities of the relationship between art and architecture, many authors explored specifically the subject and developed the collaborative concept. Worthy of note are “Frontiers: Artists and Architects” by Maggie Toy, “Interdisciplinary Architecture: Art/Architecture/Landscape: Intersections” by Nicolletta Trasi, “Art and Architecture: New Affinities” by Julia Schultz-Dornburg, “One Place After Another” by Miwon

Applying this concept to the Portuguese context, the artist Fernanda Fragateiro immediately stands out. Not only due to the historic relationship, her individual work establishes with the work of artists that appear as reference to the above mentioned authors, but also, due to the notorious collaborations she accomplished with various architects and landscape architects over the course of her carrier.

The objectives of the present dissertation are, thus, the following:

- Investigate what the 21st century art can offer to architecture, and how the converging of art towards architecture, since the middle of the 20th century, has promoted the rekindling of both these disciplines?
- Inquire the pertinence of the interdisciplinary dialogue on the design of the contemporary city.
- Understand what motivates the collaboration between artists and architects and what platforms exist where it can be achieved.
- Ascertain how these collaborations materialize, what are the benefits involved for either parties, what are the difficulties, risks and assets present in the process.
- Analyze, through the study of Fernanda Fragateiro’s work, the different results, contexts and ways in which the collaborations with architects and landscape architects were developed.
METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE:

The research on the subjects proved limitless throughout the investigation. The subjects directly related to collaborations were scarce and the associated concepts were frequently ambiguous and open to interpretation. The answer to the subject’s dispersion came, not from the main research, but from a selection of Fernanda Fragateiro’s works that better fitted the study of her collaborations in the field of architecture and the realization of interviews with the architects she collaborated with. The identification of the various references present in each work, as well as, the questions that emerge from their exploration, allowed to process the information gathered in the main research, in a concise and now organized manner.

The selected works are:

Individual works:  
- *O Paraíso é um Lugar Onde Nada Nunca Acontece*, Lisboa Capital do Nada, 2001

Collaborations:  
- Garducho Biological Station, 2002-08 - with João Maria Ventura Trindade.  

The methodology tends to avoid a chronological organization, chartering a thematic interpretation of the investigated issues, considered to be more interesting and effective for the intended ends.

The interviews performed with the artist and the architects she collaborated with, created a secondary narrative to the body of the dissertation. The questions asked, targeted the work, but also tried to capture the architects’ personal perception on the dissertation subject. The artist’s interview took on a freer tone, thus allowing the artist to deepen the subjects by their relevance in her practice.

Each chapter directly relates to one of the six selected works of Fernanda Fragateiro. The sequential structure aims to allow a global understanding of the relationship between art and architecture present in the collaborative concept and in Fernanda Fragateiro’s work.

All sections of each chapter are also accompanied by a quote related to, or taken from the interviews made to the artist and the architects. The presence of these small text passages, aims not only to introduce the subject of analysis for that particular section, but also, to hint on some of the issues that arose from the development of the case study. A parallel narrative is thus established between the selected items and the position of each architect towards the subject of the collaboration with the artist Fernanda Fragateiro, her practice and the general context of the dissertation.
The first chapters of this dissertation focus on the proximity between art and architecture and the study of the undefined space between them, where the work of Fernanda Fragateiro resides.

The transition from art to this ambiguous field begins in the early 20th century. Its evolution results from the flexing, twisting and sometimes breaking of boundaries and pre-established definitions of art and architecture. Through the unveiling of Fernanda Fragateiro’s formal, social and aesthetic intentions, as well as, her current collaborative practice, a narrative is built having as a constant counterpoint, the work of artists, frequently referenced by various authors as the vanguard of the fusion between art and architecture. Such as: Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Morris, Dan Graham, Robert Smithson, Walter de Maria, among others.

As a starting point, we turn to David Summer’s theory in Real Spaces and reflect on how the transition between dimensions and creative platforms, definitely marked the progression of art towards architecture. The first decades of the 20th century are identified as a first key moment in this transition as they mark, through the experimentalism of the Russian vanguards, the passage of art from the virtual space (bi-dimensional) to the personal space (tri-dimensional).

Fernanda Fragateiro’s exhibit “Invisibilidade”, held in Elga Benitez Gallery (Pic. 1), brings to light, the artist’s close relationship with architecture and her obvious preference for tri-dimensional pieces. Through the exploration of the works present in the exhibition, the relationship between each piece, the viewer and the architectural space is tightened and a Minimalist influence is identified.

The new artistic typologies that emerged in the 60s and 70s (Minimalism, Performance, Land Art, Art Povera and Conceptual Art) transform the way artists look at architecture. Of great importance also, is the introduction of the site-specific concept and how it will change the way artists intervene in architectural sites.

The use of architecture as an integral part of the work of art or the way artists recreate architectural forms, landscapes and environments, is explained using Rosalind Krauss’s “Expanded Field” theory and schemes.

Fernanda Fragateiro’s “Caixa para Guardar o Vazio” (Pic. 2) is a work made for the body and mind to experience. Although scale and form remote to architecture, in this case, the focus turns to the Performance aspect of the artists work. In its earlier stage Performance art implied an interdisciplinary work involving sculpture, architecture, theatre, music and dance, among others.
The use of the body as measurement, as part of the piece and, as an indispensable mean for the viewers appreciation of the work, is vital for the understanding of the artist’s profile.

In some cases, the bond between artist and audience in Performance art will evolve to the creation of places and environments suitable for human experiences and the search for a wider audience. Artists such as Vitto Acconci, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, Bruce Nauman or Scott Burton, toke the leap from Performance to Public Art.

The late 70’s were marked by the saturation of the artistic institutions and the critique of the confined and neutral gallery spaces and museums. Artists were then looking for new contexts for their site-specific works and eager to address a much larger and broader audience, thus Public Art emerged and blurred, even more, the thin line that differentiated art form architecture.

When art turns to the public space it naturally assumes architecture’s scale, function and social dimension. Jane Rendell’s “Critical Spatial Practice” term, is used to encompass not only the possibility of art having a critical attitude on disciplinary procedures and dominate ideologies in art and architecture, but also an active posture towards social and political issues.

The reflection on how artists act in real space is studied through the project “O Paraíso é um Lugar Onde Nada Nunca Acontece” (Pic.3). On this topic, Miwon Kwon differentiates between three ways works of art can appear and relate to the public context. The “art-in-public-places” concept relates to an early and poor affirmation of Public Art, based on autonomous signature-style art works sited in public places. In the “art-as-public-spaces” concept, art converges to architecture in its functional and utilitarian facet. The “art-in-the-public-interest” concept, besides being the one that better fits Fernanda Fragateiro’s project for the event Lisboa Capital do Nada due to its complexity is the one scarcest in examples.

When taken to the extreme, the “art-in-the-public-interest” concept falls in the category of “new genre public art” proposed by Suzane Lacy to define an art that places the community as the basis of the artistic creation.

The iconic “Tilted Arc”, by Richard Serra serves the purpose of the discussion between the three concepts presented. As architects, artists must now balance function, aesthetics and social context and deal with an unprecedented exposure to public criticism. In the case study “O Paraíso é um Lugar Onde Nada Nunca Acontece” (Pic.3), Fernanda Fragateiro works in the functional and social sphere and acknowledges the difficulty of public and community participated projects.

Foreseeing an exploration focused on the collaborative dynamics between artists and architects and in the merging of art and architecture in the public space, we reflect on how architecture views art. Based on the collaboration between Fernanda Fragateiro and the architect João Maria Ventura Trindade for the Garducho Biological Station Project (Pic. 4), ways of integrating works of artists into architectural projects are exposed and different models of relationship between the two disciplines are identified.
The “total work of art” concept, central to this study, is identified as an idealized end for the various ways in which art and architecture can commune. On a first instance, a reflection is carried out, based on the theoretical relationship between both fields and the long lasting influence of art in architecture.

General levels of influence are acknowledged in situations where architecture seeks art as an accomplice in the search for new ideologies, to renew its ambitions or even, in some specific cases, its own aesthetics. The analysis of the case study proves that the influence can also happen directly through the artist’s and the architect’s work.

Fernanda Fragateiro and the architect João Maria Ventura Trindade base their relationship in a bi-lateral contamination, facilitated by the proximity of workspaces and their long term friendship and admiration for each other’s practice. The collaborative process comes naturally for both artist and architect and applies not only to architectural projects, but also to some of the artists work.

As for the way art physically engages with architecture, several models are recognized throughout the centuries. The artist-architect model, the model in which art subdued to architecture and the model where art’s influence in architecture originates the most innovative tendencies, are some of the most representative.

All of these models imply a relationship between art and architecture and some even contain collaborative premises. However, through the examples of Frank Gehry’s collaboration with Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen or Herzog & de Meuron’s collaboration with Rémy Zaugg, it is acknowledged that the ideal collaboration between artists and architects should break all conventions and overcome any previously established relationship between both disciplines.

Thus, the collaborative model defended throughout this dissertation evolves from distinction into indistinction, and never the other way around. This means that the boundaries of art and architecture should be initially firm and well defined. It is also essential, that none of the disciplines defines the other’s place in the process, thus allowing the transformative process to evolve. Allowing artists and architects to take non hierarchic positions is the only possible way to a bi-lateral contamination process that permutes throughout all design stages.

As the collaborative process unfolds, all the discipline’s boundaries should fade and ideally appear to have never existed. As we can clearly witness in the given examples, the most important aspect in collaborations relies, not in the final result, but in the process and in the exemption that comes from joint work, on an individual level or a collective one.

The percent-for-art and public art programs implemented in Europe and the United States of America in the mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century are presented as the main booster of collaborative dynamics. The need to rebuild post-war cities and the beginning of the criticism of the Modern Movement bring art, back into the center of the architectural discussion. In their early formulation, these programs aimed the creation of an appealing urban environment, the promotion of community
values and the establishment of a tight bond between the city and its inhabitants. Art was then viewed as mean to humanize the sterile Modern architecture and the programs, as a way to generate jobs for artists who leaped to the public sphere.

The percent-for-art and the public art programs come also, as an attempt to institutionalize and control collaborations. The creation of a set of strict rules for the joint work between artists and architects proved early on, to be a misconception and resulted in uneasiness between both parties and developed to the unwillingness of artists and architects to work together. The failure of the National Edowment for the Arts (NEA) program, Art in Public Places, versus the success of the program, Art in Architecture, endowed by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) demonstrates the evolution of such programs and allows a factual study of the collaborative dynamics and processes.

The case study “Jardim das Ondas” by Fernanda Fragateiro, in collaboration with the landscape architect João Gomes da Silva (Pic. 5), follows true with the investigation and illustrates, not only, the advantages of a collaboration realized in the core of a public art program, but also, the innovative results that come from the joint work between artists and architects.

Despite the desire to collaborate, it proves out, that a specific context is often needed for the work to develop without boundaries. Although this collaboration wasn’t part of Lisbon’s EXPO’98 public art program, it happened in the privileged context of a national exhibition. The means available enabled the artist’s ambition and the architect’s willingness to go beyond normal procedure.

As such, “Jardim das Ondas” is frequently referenced as a collaboration where the work of the artist is indistinguishable from the architect’s. A work that perfectly blurs both disciplines frontiers. Though seemingly horizontal and balanced, the interviews to both artist and architect proved that the collaborative process was, in fact, architecture serving art’s purposes.

The last case study, by Fernanda Fragateiro in collaboration with the landscape architect José Veludo, for the project “Jardim nas Margens” (Pic. 6), illustrates the complexity of the collaborative process and the consequences that come from art’s and architecture’s different creative processes and work methods.

The sculpture “Jardim nas Margens” is located in a park designed for an urban intervention project in Cacém. The scale, the context and the number of entities involved established it as an Urban Design project that contained the artist’s and landscape architect’s collaboration.

Urban Design presents itself as a collaborative proposal more embracing than the ones studied throughout this dissertation. Nevertheless, it focuses the importance and the need for new proposals and work dynamics that break the boundaries and obsessions of the different disciplinary devices, thus becoming able to manage the new urban challenges.

Throughout the study of this last collaboration by Fernanda Fragateiro, it becomes obvious that the misconceptions and prejudice between artists and architects are still present nowadays. In
this case, it reached a point where the collaboration felt through and prevented the artist to continue her work.

Some of the main factors that still come to life in the collaborative process are, for instance: the design’s function, which comes as a requirement for any architect and as possibility for the artwork; the permanence of the architectural object as opposed to the possibility of continuous alteration of the artistic process, and the interdisciplinary teamwork, common in architecture in contrast with the individualism of the artistic process. All these issues still need to be bypassed in a successful collaboration. At another level, questions of authorship, accountability and control still break through.

The idea that it is impossible to devise a recipe for success or a list of key-points to obey in order to achieve a balanced collaboration is obviously shown in the case studies related to the collaborations made by Fernanda Fragateiro.
Pic. 1. Invisibilidade Exhibit, Leme Gallery (S. Paulo), 2009: General View.


Pic. 3. Fernanda Fragateiro – O Paraiso é um Lugar Onde Nada Nunca Acontece, for the event Lisbon Capital do Nada, in Marvila, 2002.

Pic. 4. Garducho Biological Station, Mourão, 2002-2008, architecture by Ventura Trindade Architects with the intervention of Fernanda Fragateiro.


CONCLUSIONS:

In the conclusions, a path opposite to the one followed in the development of the subject in the present dissertation, is proposed. Thus, disclosing the value of the collaborative concept in an urban context of growing complexity and indeterminacy.

The city is designed today at various levels, incorporating various scales and dealing, not only, with the spatial issues but also, with the economic and social aspects. An Urban Design project nowadays, involves a growing number of actors and stages to the process. All the interviewed architects point out these factors as relevant to the continuity of the collaborative experiences: João Maria Ventura Trindade points out that currently “the requirements of a building are so demanding and extend, that we have to be fully concentrated on our specialty, which makes it hard to have time or capacity to master various things at the same time.”

In this context, it becomes clear that none of the existing relationship models between art and architecture referred can serve as a solution to the raised issues.

The collaboration between artists and architects, as defined along the dissertation, is taken as a solution with enormous topicality and consistency with the instability, indefiniteness, rhythm and complexity of the urban cities of the 21st century. By renewing its interest towards art, architecture recovers its humanity, sometimes lost in the glare of new technological solutions, and opens itself to the possibility of a relationship with the user, with a community and with society in general.

The situations that emerge from the case studies were enlightening and often a surprise. They also proved that the prejudice between both disciplines did not disappear in the context of the collaboration. The affinity between art and architecture is continuously tainted by the obvious differences in methodology, trails of thought and views on the world, on man and on society, characteristic to each discipline.

In the artist’s collaboration with the architect João Maria Ventura Trindade, issues with authorship arise from an intimate and trust based relationship between artist and architect. In the case study “Jardim das Ondas” case, a collaboration that is, at first glance, conceived in the extreme of the collaborative idealism, reveals itself as architecture in the service of art. Creating a reversed situation to the one explored in the section that refers to the “total work of art”, in which architecture undoubtedly subdues all disciplines.

1 João Maria Ventura Trindade – Excerpt from the interview conducted by author.
The case study “Jardim nas Margens” by Fernanda Fragateiro, simultaneously raises issues related with the usage, with the transition from the concept to the materialization and brings to sight, the artist’s control issues when exposed to a larger scale architectural project.

As the definition of art and architecture became broader to encompass the expansion of their boundaries, the “total work of art” must also include new forms of interpretation. Besides the full collaboration where, from the conceptual to the construction stage, artist and architect share the design process and their individual works merge perfectly together. The “total work of art” must now take into account results that did not emerge from a collaborative process, but that, at the end effectively eased the lines that separate the architect’s work from the artist’s intervention.

Even though this is rarely achieved, it is clear that it is through a full collaboration with artists that architecture reaches its more interesting and relevant results. At an individual level, it is important to point, the immeasurable benefits to the artists and architects involved and the learning and liberating process consequent to the collaborative dynamics.

The investigation of various public art and percent-for-art programs, it becomes clear that a collaborative relationship with an artist that possesses a strong connection to architecture is more likely to succeed. Artists that show interest for the constructed space or for the creation of real or even virtual environments, are more likely to endure the difficulties of the collaborative process. And artists that focus their work on social issues or in the establishment of a close relationship with the community and with the general public are of great interest in a collaboration with an architect.

Fernanda Fragateiro presents a specific relationship with architecture, that becomes obvious in the way she uses it as a creative process and how it transcends her works. Of greater importance is the way architecture is stated as a condition of existence for all her bidimensional or tridimensional works. The artist’s interest for the architectural space, crossed with the constant use of the scale of the body, results in an ambition to create environments, to transform the fiscal space. All of which, of great relevance to the way she admits the possibility of intervening in any design.

Art enters architecture usually with a specific function. A function that varies from decoration, communication, humanization, attenuation of rigid form, as a mean of increasing value, of providing an identity or even just as functional or playful element. In the project “O Paraíso é um Lugar Onde Nada Nunca Acontece”, Fernanda Fragateiro encloses all this functions and, at the same time, integrates art’s recent tendency towards public participation projects.

The mentioned characteristics, confirm the artist’s aptitude to intervene in architectural projects, as well as an essential posture for collaborating. Understood in her availability and flexibility as an artist and also, by a distinctive curiosity and that allows her to meet various opportunities of thought and action with an enormous enthusiasm and interest. Nevertheless, the case studies reveal that Fernanda Fragateiro falls constantly short of the full collaborative experience.
Early on, it was safeguarded that collaborations can only develop from distinct fields and should result in a design where it's almost impossible to identify the work of each participating field. Fernanda Fragateiro follows the first premise, by defining, early on, her limits and her field of action, but hitherto she rarely get truly involved in the process. By never letting her guard down, she prevents the full contamination and liberation process characteristic to a complete collaboration. This defensive attitude is proven by the artist’s admission of the discomfort felt and the unwillingness to repeat the only experience where she openly altered her methodology, in the project “O Paraíso é um Lugar Onde Nada Nunca Acontece”.

The artist’s pragmatic posture, as well as, the frequently functional solutions she adopts when intervening in architectural designs, can however, be regarded as a mean to accomplish the client’s and the public’s approval. The conscientious option for concretization at the expense of experimentation is legitimized when in contrast to some results of bolder art works, such as Richard Serra’s “Tilted Arc”, or the extreme collaboration of Frank Gehry with Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, that never reached construction.

We then conclude that Fernanda Fragateiro’s unique posture when undertaking collaborative projects with architects relays on the distinct combination of a willingly but, at the same time, defensive attitude. The fact that the artist is yet to experience liberation and the benefits that a total collaborative experience can convey is attenuated by the desire to do so. In the artist’s own words:

“I would like to work, especially with João Gomes da Silva, in those molds and, maybe one day, a real collaborative project will appear. Not a project where I am not called to comment his work, but a project that we can think, design and build together. A project in which there are no recognizable fields, where the artists work is indistinguishable from the architect’s. That is probably at the threshold of collaborations and a very, very difficult thing to achieve.”

Fernanda Fragateiro – Excerpt from the interview conducted by author.