

Title: Art, Architecture and the Law: The Architectural Project and the Legal Contract as Social Artefacts

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Abstract:

In an installation presented at the Cooper Gallery in New York in 2005, the British-American artist Carey Young located six vinyl lines on the floor and walls of a room. She then placed an inscription announcing that the American Constitution would temporarily not apply to those who decided to stand within the space defined by the lines. In this political yet playful installation entitled *Declared Void*, Young points to the grey zones of the legal system, while also questioning the social role of architecture, and even our understanding of what constitutes a defined space. In a piece entitled *Double Game*, 1999, the artist Sophie Calle worked with Paul Auster in a performance piece in which they mutually entered a contract according to which Calle played the role of a character in one of Auster's novels. It involved her deliberately appropriating various sites in New York City in such a way that the accepted conventions of their public use were overturned. Converting, for example, a telephone booth into a decorated interior space for private use she temporarily broke basic spatial contracts about the shared use of spaces in the city while, simultaneously, placing the 'contract' at the center of the work.

Similarly, the Spanish artist Santiago Sierra has played with notions of the contract and our contractual use and reading of spaces in works such as *A line of 160cm tattooed on 4 people*, 2000, in which he uses the gallery setting as a spatial symbol that 'legitimizes' the contracting of four prostitutes in an agreement that allows their bodies to be indelibly marked in the name of an art performance. Following a tradition evident since the 1950s, the work of these artists has used the notion of the contract and the social ambiguities of space in a way that has either been foregrounded in their final pieces, or is indispensable to the discomfort created by their work. Operating in a blurred legal and spatial zone, these artists question the jurist's notions of the contract and the architect's ideas of space. As a result, they also open up both disciplines to a cross disciplinary reading that investigates their real and conceptual overlaps. In creating works that invite a 'contractual' (and thus immaterial) reading of physical space and an examination of the 'real' (and thus material) consequences of the contract they allow us to consider issues of direct importance to the theory of law; architecture's role in contemporary society; and how a cross disciplinary perspective of these issues potentially opens architecture and the contract – understood as social artefacts – to the full implications of a reading through the prism of Hannah Arendt's 'subjective in-between' – a realm in which the "intangible is no less real than the world of things we visible have in common".