Theatre of Operations, or:

Construction Site as Architectural Design

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Doctor of Philosophy
2012   RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia
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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Johan R. Van Den Berghe

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Arch. Lenie Dhooghe: drawings Etude and House DG-DR
Arch. Daan Dufait: scale models House DG-DR and House B
Arch. Peter Guillaume: scale model Gothic Tower of Lissewege
Arch. Ruben D’hont: scale model My Grandmother’s House
Arch. Stijn De Vos: scale model My Grandmother’s House
Arch. Antonin De Kimpe: scale model My Grandmother’s House

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Theatre of Operations

My Grandmother's House

Operations: An overarching essay → the argument

Users Guide

Framed drawings:
- Sections scale 1:20 and 1:1
- Sketches (the chronological drawings)

Longitudinal section of the practice =
- the backbone of the work
- Incorporates the basic stances of the argument
- Family

Chapters → Sections
- Transverse sections of the work
- Unpack each project
- Incarnate specific aspects: "wider thinner lips, a larger forehead"
- Underpin and demonstrate the basic stances of the argument
- "Smallbooks"
- In depth investigation of each project:
  - Sketches, drawings, tracing paper, photographs, essay

Chronology of consultation of the sections = free
- Cross references between the sections

A SLICE OF MY LIFE
This User’s Guide is more a suggestion than an obligation. I invite the visitor and the reader to first look and let the first impressions seep into his/her mind. Then, the presented work can be consulted in a more structured way, in which this User’s Guide may be helpful. The exhibition concept should allow for a manifold of possible consultations of the work, hoping for different readings, like for instance consulting the parts of the exhibition in a reverse order, or at random, allowing for a myriad of cross references that generate new insights.

The concept of the exhibition is driven by my aspiration to disseminate the research process, and the research output, in the most effective way so as to serve (future) architectural practice.

The dissemination of this Ph.D consists of:
- the exhibition
- ‘The 7 Books’: The Overarching Essay in which I explain my basic argument, and 6 SmallBooks in which I present further detail
- the oral presentation at the Ph.D exhibition.

THE EXHIBITION
The exhibition consists of:
- the scale model in which ‘The 7 Books’ are lodged
- drawings
- research documents
PICTURES IN AN EXHIBITION

I have been in the fortunate circumstance to exhibit my work and do my Ph.D Defence in the University Library of the University of Ghent. It is the masterpiece of the Belgian architect Henry Van de Velde (Van de Velde 1936). Van de Velde co-founded the Kunstgewerbeschule Weimar, the predecessor of the Bauhaus.

The following pages include a number of photographs of the Ph.D Defence on 23 November 2012, and of the PH.D Exhibition that ran between 23 November 2012 and 4 January 2013.
Preparations for the Ph.D Defence, 23 November 2012.
Theatre of Operations, or:
A new way of architectural design

[Image of a presentation slide]
The Scale Model:
The central part of the doctoral exhibition is the scale model. It is a longitudinal section of the practice under investigation, and it traverses the landscape-as-section, which is the basic layer of my mental space (van Schaik 2008). Through the scale model, I can provide the interested visitor with an insight into the four basic design themes coming forth from my mental space, that I have brought to the surface through these investigations: Thickness, Substance, Darkness, Depth. These basic design themes are also present in the work of other architects whose work contributes to the discussions of this Ph.D, and I refer to them throughout the Overarching Essay (see SmallBook 2), and the other SmallBooks of the Ph.D.
I perceive my personal landscape at my eye level: I am a vertical tall standing man, and I refer to him regularly throughout the Ph.D. From this highly individual eye level, as a standing man, I see the inclining landscape as The Emergence of Thickness, and I can anatomise and understand the Depth of this Thickness through the consequent application of the Concept of Section.

The scale model is a densified version of the longitudinal axis, the spine, along which my construction site as a practicing architect—my Theatre of Operations—is ongoing, and it demonstrates ‘The Emergence of Thickness and the Concept of Section’, and ‘Depth as the First Dimension’, as the two aprioristic conditions that I have brought to the surface through the investigations of the Ph.D, and without which the work under scrutiny here (which includes both my work and the work of other architects who contribute to the discussions of the Ph.D—my communities of practice as the spine of my literature study) cannot exist. These aprioristic conditions are the basic layer that cradles the work.

Embedded and active in this basic layer of the aprioristic conditions, I have discovered a set of concepts:
1. The Eye Level in the Perspective / the Labyrinthine;
2. Borrowing from Tektonikos;
3. The Chronological Drawing / Chronology on the Drawing Table;
4. Designing in Substance / Substance on the Drawing Table;
5. The X-Ray-Drawing;

Together, and applied in the aforementioned aprioristic conditions, these concepts are the tools of the architect, necessary to perform the basic design themes of Thickness, Substance, Depth, Darkness. My research has revealed that these 5 concepts are grouped around the core Concept of Section. The scale model, then, is a most dense, direct and substantial way to demonstrate these findings to the public, and to visibly disseminate the output of the research.

Because of the importance of the eye level in my findings, and in the work—both my work and the work of my heroes—I have positioned the scale model at a height so as to facilitate the exact observation by the visitor onto the presented landscape-as-section.
In line with the core Concept of Section, the scale model incorporates ‘The 7 Books’ (The Overarching Essay, and 6 SmallBooks), as traverse sections of the longitudinal section of the practice. These traverse sections further anatomise and demonstrate the work under scrutiny.

The Drawings:
Then, a set of drawings demonstrates the central position of the architectural drawing in my work. Furthermore, the presented drawings demonstrate the aforementioned set of concepts I have brought to the surface by these doctoral investigations, in that I show original documents on which the discoveries have
been made, and a number of further developments on the discovered concepts as a demonstration of the ongoing research on them, and of their potential and their use in (my) innovated architectural practice, and directly applicable in architectural education.

The drawings—prominently sections—demonstrate the central position of the core Concept of Section in the work, hence in this research. These drawings are a pledge for an intensified application of the Concept of Section in future architectural practice, starting with my pledge for their application in architectural education, the incubator of future architectural practice.

I present these drawings not merely as representations of a reality outside themselves. To me, the drawings are pure presence in their own right, and I situate them in the borderland between the work of the architect and a work of art. For these reasons, I have wanted to present these drawings as a core component of the Ph.D.

**Research Documents:**
A number of research documents, such as sketches and drawings, field notes, memo writings, written explorations of the work of other architects who contribute to the ongoing discussions in this Ph.D, are exhibited in glass showcases in the exhibition space. These documents provide the interested visitor with an insight in the ongoing research actions.

**‘THE 7 BOOKS’**
The 7 Books consist of:
- **SmallBook (1):** the User’s Guide
- **SmallBook (2):** The Overarching Essay
- **SmallBook (3):** Work
- **SmallBook (4):** The Book of Narratives
- **SmallBook (5):** Construction Practice as Architectural Design
- **SmallBook (6):** Images of Chronicles of Design—Research in a Project
- **SmallBook (7):** Biography, References, Bibliography, Acknowledgments, Validation Procedures.

The concept of SmallBooks has been generated by designing the exhibition, based on the core Concept of Section, enabling me to combine the longitudinal section of the scale model with traverse sections of the SmallBooks.

The modular concept of SmallBooks also enables the reader to define his/her own reading process, allowing for a modular reading, savouring bits and bites. I was inspired by the weekend newspaper, and every member of the family reading a part of it at the same time.

It allows for a ‘slim’ reading of The Overarching Essay only, or a thorough reading including all the ‘SmallBook-modules’ at once, or all the other possibilities in between.
Also, it facilitates the combined reading of, for instance, the main text of The Overarching Essay SmallBook (2), with the list of References (SmallBook (7)) ‘at hand’, or with other parts of the exegesis, because the books can be placed next to each other on the reading desk of the reader, allowing for cross reading, cross references, etc …

**SmallBook (1):** this is the User’s Guide, which also contains the Table of Content. By putting it in a separate volume, I want to facilitate the reading of The Overarching Essay.

**SmallBook (2):** The Overarching Essay. This is the core description of the Ph.D. It can be read without the other SmallBooks, that have been conceived of as ‘attachments’ to the Overarching Essay, allowing to go into further detail for those who are interested. It is my suggestion to read The Overarching Essay first, and then to eventually read the other SmallBooks.

**SmallBook (3):** Work. There, I present the work of the practice, as I have selected it in the early stages of the research. It can be consulted separately, or in an inclusive reading with The Overarching Essay.

**SmallBook (4):** The Book of Narratives. In this SmallBook, I have gone into the verbal-creative mode so as to include all the emotions and experiences of the places I have visited in my mental space, because making these emotions and experiences explicit through language has permitted me to bring more useful information into the research.
It is my suggestion to read The Overarching Essay first, and then to eventually read the narratives.
While reading the narratives, especially Section 2.3.3 / 2-2: A Journey into Memory and Imagination, I suggest to first read it without the footnotes, so as not to interrupt the stream of consciousness, and to be immersed by it. Then, in a second reading, the extensive set of footnotes can bring these experiences back to the verbal-descriptive mode, where they become grounded as data in the research.

**SmallBook (5):** Construction Practice as Architectural design.
The projects described in this SmallBook are further elaborations on the design themes as described for House DG-DR (1999-2004)(see Section 2.3.4 / 5). SmallBook (5) is additional information and confirms the findings from House DG-DR through their application in the ongoing practice. The Overarching Essay can be read and understood without reading SmallBook (5).

**SmallBook (6):** Images of Chronicles of Design-Research in a Project.
This SmallBook almost has no text. Subsequent to the GRC-presentation of November 2011, I have acted on feedback and included all the drawings presented in this SmallBook, as a demonstration of the intense connections between the practice and the research (themes).

**SmallBook (7):** Biography, References, Bibliography, Acknowledgments, Validation Procedures.
I have put all the servant information (references, bibliography, validation procedures) in a separate volume that can be laid open next to the volume of The Overarching Essay.
As for the abbreviations. I have used for the names of the projects: I have done so because I have wanted to preserve the privacy of the names of the clients. The abbreviations are the initials of their names.

As for the references: when I mention the pages of the books in the list of references, the pages behind a / are references coming from one of the SmallBooks other than SmallBook 2.

I have included all the references to other works made by other architects in the list of references, like I have done with the references to written documents, because, in my view, a work of architecture counts as much as a full reference as a written document or a quote by an author does. This is a Ph.D by project.

As for the footnotes:
The brown footnotes: I have made the set of footnotes extensive in order to demonstrate the connections between the work and the research with my communities of practice, which is the context of the work and the research (contextualisation). Since these connections are there, I have considered it useful, even necessary, to include them in the upcoming descriptions.
The blue footnotes: I have included the notes for the images with the footnotes, as to demonstrate the equal status of images and text.

I hope you enjoy looking at the work, and reading it.

Jo Van Den Berghe architect, 23 November 2012.
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© Jo Van Den Berghe architect

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