3
Work
Theatre of Operations, or:
Construction Site as Architectural Design
Jo Van Den Berghe architect
Doctor of Philosophy
2012 RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia
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Construction Site as Architectural Design

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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.

[Signature]

Johan R. Van Den Berghe

09 September 2012.
2.3.2 / 2

**Work**

The First Interrogation of the Practice has generated a well-balanced number of samples of the practice\(^1\), with two criteria in mind:

1. to provide a sampling of projects with characteristics that connect with my research theme, and that are useful for the further investigation of it;
2. to provide a sampling as a correct section of the work.

In Table 1, the numbers/percentages of the different typologies produced by my practice can be compared with the numbers/percentages of the selected projects. Both numbers/percentages correspond well (apart from the number of projects in the countryside/nature reserve), which indicates that the sampling has been done accurately with respect to the work, hence to the research theme.\(^2\) The latter indicates that the chosen research theme connects with the nature of the investigated work\(^3\), given the fact that there would come a second interrogation of the practice\(^4\) that would allow to tune in even more precisely.

I will now present the works selected through the First Interrogation of the Practice in Smallbook (3), and subsequently continue on the main argument of the Ph.D. in Smallbook 2: The Overarching Essay.

In the current smallbook, I will present each selected project with a short introductory text that demonstrates the characteristics for which the project has been selected both from the point of view of the practice, and from the point of view of the research.

Subsequently, I want to give priority to sketches, drawings, and images. The architectural image autonomously explains the nature of the selected projects and is—apart from the piece of architecture itself—the first and foremost communicator of the work.

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\(^1\) The practice started in 1987, after three years as an apprentice in the studio of architect Juliaan Lampens. Most of the time, I worked alone. I have collaborated with architect Frank Tinel (Project O 1996). In 2002, I have founded y.e.AH!-architects, with architect Bart Uvin. In this collaboration, we are doing two schools, and the restauration of a 17th Century boarding school. The Boathouse 2 also is a project we do with y.e.AH!-architects. For obvious reasons of authorship (a Ph.D. is personal and individual), and to sharply focus on my research theme, I have only included these (parts of) the y.e.AH!-projects that are clearly and mainly done by me: New Stairs (see Section 2.3.5 / 2), and the Boathouse 1 and The Boathouse 2 (see Section 2.4.3).

\(^2\) And given the applied sampling criteria as can be seen in the Table, which are the usual criteria architects apply when they explain the profile of their practice.

\(^3\) “Sampling in grounded theory proceeds not in terms of drawing samples of specific groups of individuals, units of time, and so on, but in terms of concepts, their properties, dimensions, and variations. When a project begins, the researcher brings to it some idea of the phenomenon he or she wants to study. Based on this knowledge, groups of individuals, an organisation, or community representative of that phenomenon can be selected for study” (Corbin and Strauss 1990).

\(^4\) See Section 2.3.4.
### TABLE 1: Overview of my practice (August 2012): Typologies of Projects, and The First Interrogation of the Practice / Selection.

**TYPOLOGIES OF PROJECTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>family houses</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29.93</td>
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<tr>
<td>family houses / transformations</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>31.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>furniture</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>apartment blocks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practice/business/industry</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public buildings</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total number of Projects (August 2012)** 137 100.00

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>built projects</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>64.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unbuilt projects</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>urban</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29.92</td>
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<tr>
<td>suburban</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>37.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>country</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nature reserve</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE FIRST INTERROGATION OF THE PRACTICE / SELECTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>NAME PROJECT</th>
<th>NEW / TRANSFORM</th>
<th>BUILT / UNBUILT</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2</td>
<td>Social Housing Gent (1989 / unbuilt)</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>unbuilt</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>social housing</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.2</td>
<td>House S-U (1989-1991)</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>suburban</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.3</td>
<td>House VDV-C (1990 / unbuilt)</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>unbuilt</td>
<td>country</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.4</td>
<td>Community Center (1993-1996)</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>suburban</td>
<td>community centre</td>
<td>public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.5</td>
<td>Studio Graphic (1996 / unbuilt)</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>unbuilt</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>design studio</td>
<td>business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.6</td>
<td>Dentists Practice (1997-1998)</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>suburban</td>
<td>dentists practice</td>
<td>practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.7</td>
<td>CL2-Apartments (1997-2002)</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>appartments</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.8</td>
<td>House VDA-DP (1997-2002)</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>suburban</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.9</td>
<td>House VD-DN (1997-1999)</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>country</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.10</td>
<td>House ST (1998-2001)</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>suburban</td>
<td>house + truck workshop</td>
<td>private + business</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3.2.11</td>
<td>Summerhouse (2001-2004)</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>nature reserve</td>
<td>holiday house</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.12</td>
<td>House DS-DR (1999-2004)</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>house + practice</td>
<td>private + practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.13</td>
<td>House VAE (2000-2002)</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.14</td>
<td>House D-R (2004-2007)</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>suburban</td>
<td>house extension</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.15</td>
<td>House T-A (2001-2002 / unbuilt)</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>country</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.16</td>
<td>House B-M (2003-2006 / unbuilt)</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>country</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.17</td>
<td>House B (2005-2007)</td>
<td>new</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>suburban</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2.18</td>
<td>WoSho / Fashion (1986-2012)</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>country</td>
<td>house/fashion workshop</td>
<td>private + business + practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WoSho / Architecture</td>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>unbuilt</td>
<td>country</td>
<td>arch. studio</td>
<td>practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Selected Projects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>selected new</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selected transformation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selected built</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selected unbuilt</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selected urban</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selected suburban</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selected countryside</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and nature reserve</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Housing Ghent (1989 / unbuilt)


Social Housing Ghent (1989 / unbuilt): plans, sections and elevations, scale 1/100.
This project is a competition, launched by the Flemish government in the fall of 1988, for a social housing project in the northern sector of the 19th century industrial belt around Ghent. The design brief states that 20 dilapidated workers houses be refurbished so as to bring them onto an up to date standard. The aim was clearly to restore the existing houses as a relic of the Industrial Revolution.

In order to guard the very restricted budget, I have left the main brick structure of the houses as intact as possible, only intervening in them on some very strategic places, like for instance in the entrance bays of the houses at street level.

I have won the competition, but the project has not been built.

I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because of its meaning for the practice:
− it is a competition I have won in 1989, which has been the first recognition of my work on a national level;
− it has been the only social housing project I have done.

because of its possible meaning for this research:
− because I refined and applied a spatial concept in it, that I would later also apply in other projects, which is:
  on the one hand, to collect a number of servant functions in dense zones in the plan as compact as possible, which enables me
  on the other hand to obtain served spaces as spartious as possible, combined with a flexible concept of spatial compartmentalization that enhances the freedom of everyday life;7
− I discovered social space in this house, not only in the overlap between the public sphere and the family sphere, but also in the central living space as the public (collective) sphere of family life.

Not knowing where this research would be going to at the moment of selection, I did not immediately want to leave this social research track out yet. The concepts I just come to describe still apply in my current work, yet they do not directly belong to the main argument of this Ph.D.

7 See Section 2.3.4 / 5: House DG-DR (1999-2004), and Section 2.3.4 / 6-3: House T-A (2001-2002).
This project is an extension of an existing terraced family house (the mother, the father, the daughter) in a suburban context. It is a small intervention with a maximum impact on the spatious quality of the house. The framework of the windows has been extended with a framework for removable sunscreens. The intervention has stretched the garden façade of the house from a thin surface to an enjoyable borderland between the interior and the garden.

I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because of its meaning for the practice:
- it has been a mentally rewarding project in the early years of the practice, because I could assimilate for the first time—through a real project—with one of my masters (F.L. Wright), more specifically with the Schwartz House, Two Rivers, Wisconsin, US. (Wright 1938);
- I had made a series of drawings of the window details on scale 1/20, collected in a A3 booklet with spiral binding that was very practical at the construction site;
- I wanted to apply the working method of Ferdinand Schlich, one of my teachers during my apprenticeship, who had done a transformation of a house in Ghent, in the Raes van Gaverestraat, while I was working in his office. I remembered the words of a carpenter who had come to the office one day,
bringing in a bid to get the commission, saying that "every architect should make detailed technical drawings like that (the drawings were made on scale 1/10 and 1/1), in order to be unambiguous from the beginning, and to avoid mistakes on the construction site".

because of its possible meaning for the research:
- within the framework of a Ph.D, this work might open the connections with my communities of practice, more specifically with Frank Lloyd Wright;
- through this work, I might be able to describe the relationship master-pupil, which I consider as very important in an apprenticeship as a part of (my) architectural education.

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This project is a family house (the mother, the father, and two sons). It has not been built in this form. The built version is not displeasing me, yet it is remote from this original version hence from the main argument of this research.

Of the version at stake here, there have been made a number of variants: one in brick, one clad with zinc slates, one clad with brick rooftiles.

The house (the built version) has been built by good craftsmen who have taught me construction practice and respect for their profession.

I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because of its meaning for the practice:

- it has been a very intense and pondering design process;
- I have done a very thorough study of the technical details of the house, through a series of large sections on scale 1/10, 1/5, and 1/1, because I wanted ‘to go to the bottom’ of the substance architecture is made of;
– it was an early project in the practice through which I wanted to learn, almost to the point where it has become something physical, like digging a hole in the ground;
– it has been the project through which I had to exorcise my demons.

because of its possible meaning for the research:
– I have always found that this house has been a fundamental project in my practice, and I wanted to find out why;
– this has been the first house in which to make really began to inform to dream, and I thought that my investigations on this house might unveil (something) of that.
This project is the transformation of an old village school into a local community center. Of the three original buildings, I have removed the middle one, which was completely dilapidated. I have replaced it by a new entrance building that also contains the wardrobe, and the technical facilities. I have designed this community center in connection with the public space that belongs to it: it is a small public square that smartly incorporates the landscape-as-section through a set of diagonal stairs that form an improvised row of seats for eventual public happenings on the lower zone of the square.

The two existing buildings that have remained, have completely been refurbished. The one on the right is a larger parlour for indoor happenings organised by this local community, the one on the left has two smaller spaces, one for the local brass band, and one for the local theatre company.

I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because of its meaning for the practice:

this has been the first public building that I actually have built. Before, I had designed another Community Center (S.G.O. 1989), and the transformation of the City Hall of my hometown (Z. 1991), and afterwards I have made a design for the Cultural Centre of M. (1999), but these projects have remained unbuilt;

- I am simply fond of this project, more specifically about the way the architecture and the public space merge;
- I have been able to stay within the limits of a very restricted budget;
- through this project, I could learn all the administrative procedures applied in public projects in Flanders;
- through this project, I have made the acquaintance of a number of good contractors;
- through this project, I have experienced downsides of the politics-architecture combination.

because of its possible meaning for the research:

- if the course of my research would bring me to the investigation of a public building and public (social) space as to serve my argument in the Ph.D, I considered this project very suitable for it;
- at a certain moment, very early in my research, I have considered to investigate the politics-architecture combination, with references to the relations between the misfortune of the avant-garde Soviet architecture and the Stalinist regime, but I soon have decided not to spend my (research) time on it;
- this project explicitly refers to James Stirling’s and James Gowan’s *Leicester University Engineering Building* (Stirling and Gowan 1964) as one of the prominent projects from my communities of practice. So this was another reason to select this project.
I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice. The reasons for this selection are to be found in the meaning this project has for my practice, which is also the possible meaning for my research.

This project was an extension of an urban house with an office for Studio Graphic, in Z., Belgium (1996 / unbuilt). This extension was situated at the back of a house in a dense urban setting.

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On the street level of this terraced house, there was a graphic design practice (Studio Graphic). On the first floor, I had my architectural practice from the fall of 1992 until the fall of 2001. The house had a cozy immured urban garden that spatially connected with similar immured gardens with old beech trees. The extension, spatially belonging to the garden, was the connection, bringing the garden into the formal part of the house. The design has remained unbuilt.

I wanted to see three main design objectives fulfilled:
- Firstly, all the components should be light weight, given the fact that they would have to be carried by two men through a narrow corridor of about 85 cm, and a normal doorway, to the back of the house.
- Secondly, the new spaces should be free of intermediary columns, and provide a maximum surface of glass towards an immured urban garden with old trees. So the parallel walls should enclose both the design studio at the ground floor level and the garden in order to unite them as one space.
- Thirdly, the two roof terraces should accommodate reception places for larger groups of people during summer nights, taking into account that a design studio could also be a place where clients could meet. This is a good illustration of what Leon van Schaik calls the civic spine, that vivid urban environment where diasporic cultures of all kinds come together around an elevated discourse and good food, often promoted by a creative economy, of which this graphic design studio has been a perfect example in that small town in the 1980’s and 1990’s.

I decided to apply timber because of the light weight possibilities and the possible assemblage of ordinary wooden elements such as rafters and plywood boards for the fitch plated junctions. The weight and the dimensions of all these elements, either separated or assembled, could be brought in through a normal doorway by two men.

If I wanted to succeed in the third design objective, the terraces for receptions, I knew I had to make precise calculations in order to reach an overall bearing capacity of 5 kN/m2. I designed a sophisticated roof structure as an assemblage of low-fi elements with limited dimensions that either could be prefabricated or be assembled on the site. I pondered about the material, the configuration and the dimensions of the structural components so that a crane would not be necessary. In total, five of these trusses would do to carry the two flat roofs. The wooden trusses would then graciously disappear into carefully masoned niches of the brick walls upon which they lean. Then, a set of eleven parallel rafters, perpendicular to the wooden trusses, would bridge the gap between the wooden spans. In order to improve the bearing capacities up to 5kN/m2, I decided to apply DOKA-rafters15 normally used for heavy duty scaffolding, coloured by applying their regular yellow stain, adding a joyful touch to the uncommon combination. The whole structure should remain visible to express the spirit of openness and visibility of the graphic design business it housed.

Jean Prouvé and Pierre Jeanneret built their BBC House, Saint-Auban, France (Prouvé and Jeanneret 1941) as a tribute to structural visibility and low budget feasability, making composed trusses—wood plus plywood—and a wooden A-shaped portico as the bearing element of the structure and the central moment in that space (Techniques et Architectures 1942).

14 Studio Graphic is a Belgian office for graphic design.
15 I had already applied them in a design for a counter. I also used them for the central part of House VD-DN (see Section 2.3.2 / 2-9), and in House DG-DR (see Section 2.3.2 / 2-12, and Section 2.3.4 / 5). In the two latter cases they are combined with a glass floor. Up till now, I am very fond of this kind of material, normally used to serve the production of other materials into a house. I mentioned the qualities of good scaffolding before, and I will remain to do so whenever it suits.
Alvar Aalto’s *Pavilion in the Giardini*, Venice, Italy (Aalto 1956) also has this kind of sophisticated roof structure that is capable of transforming a limited floor surface into a heterotopic spatial event.

While designing these trusses, I had remembered a canoe, brought in by a German tourist on that beach of a lake in France in 1991. It was properly packed in a canvas bag, and when it was openend, a set of very refined varnished wooden sticks with smart sections and ends popped up, and each end was finished with chrome steel joints through which stainless steel rods could be plugged in in order to quickly compose the space frame of the canoe. Then, the canvas bag could swiftly be wrapped around this structure, and the canoe was ready in five minutes!

The three design imperatives I elaborated on were compelling but meaningful, because I wanted—and still want—to build ‘that canoe’. So, to a great extent, these imperatives were self imposed, since I had my office on the first floor of that house in those days. I saw opportunities to contribute and participate in this vibrant urban culture. Only a short time later, urban policy making changed dramatically though, resulting in an exodus of the creative class, followed by a dramatic implosion of commercial activities, leaving this town orphaned as a shadow of what it once has been. Studio Graphic left, then I left. And this project has never been built.
This project is situated in a house in which a couple of dentists—man and wife—shared a practice in one consultation room. Because of the expansion of the practice, a second consultation room was needed. The former garage has been transformed into a waiting room, an extra consultation room on the first floor, a stairway, a rest room, and a store room. The compactness of the space has triggered me to create a poetic and playful design.

I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because its meaning for my practice:

- the design brief was very difficult and complex: how to make an additional consultation room for a dentist in a dentists practice that had to remain ongoing during the construction on the site, which was in the existing house?
- despite the limited space, the result is very spacious, labyrinthine even;
- for technical reasons (piping), the ceiling above the waiting room had to remain accessible, because the extra consultation room for a dentist was situated above it. I have turned this necessity into a poetic possibility by making a ceiling that can be opened by several normal doors, thus creating a strange and omnidimensional atmosphere that adds to the spacious quality of the compact space, and that brings in poetry in a place were most people normally do not like to go to (the dentist!);
- I have worked with a team of young contractors, and this cooperation has been very successful;
- a very extensive set of technical detail drawings has guided the construction process successfully;
- the design of the entrance is a stage with designed objects (a letterbox, a vertical 'dental' lighting object) that invitingly relates the practice with the topography.

because of the possible meaning for the research:

- I assumed that this project, not being a house, could diversify the set of cases within this Ph.D, on the condition that it would serve my argument;
- the poetics of the ceiling doors might be worth investigating in a Ph.D. that started as a research on poetics in architecture.
2.3.2 / 2-7  CL2-Appartments (1997-2002)

This project is the thorough transformation of the first, second, third and fourth floors of an 18th century Classicist urban house into two luxury appartments. I had successfully done the transformation of the ophtalmology practice on the street level in 1994-1995.

I have carefully guarded the spatial and structural modulation of the original edifice, yet liberated the spaces by ‘cutting’ an number of surprising vista’s through existing walls and ceilings. Then, an elaborated system of precisely designed and drawn built-in furniture compactly anchors the basic functions so as to give space to the lives of its inhabitants.

18 CL2-Appartments: interior views.
I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because of its meaning for my practice:

− Drawings: I have experienced the handcrafted drawings as extremely important for the way my practice works: the skills of the draftsman (me), working with the substance of pencil and paper. In the drawings I made for this project, I became aware of the timing and action of drawing a line—drawing a line—in which time and place co-exist. The act of drawing, in this set of drawings, has been the embodied measurement of time and place, when time is taking place. The smell of the cedar pencil, each time I sharpened it, reminded me of the substance of the furniture I was designing by drawing it. There and then, I enjoyed the physical and emotional fulfillment of doing it. Sir Henry Wotton, who made the first English translation of Vitruvius’ writings in 1624, translated Vitruvius’s “Firmitas, Utilitas, Venustas” into: “Firmnesse, Comodotie, Delight” (Wotton 1624), wherein part of the delight is for the architect in doing it. The making of it is for the delight of the maker. In this series of drawing sessions, I have experienced—physically, through my drawing hand and my motions coming from my elbow, my wrist, and my fingers—that the architectural drawing was the centre, the time of doing was the moment of metamorphosis from to dream to to make. Ai Weiwei contends that “Making is so important. It is not the product that is being made. The product has made us. Our technology really has made us. And through the making we become aware of who we are, and it demonstrates to people who we are” (Ai Weiwei 2011).

− Materials (substance): in order to have an early and direct contact with the building materials (substance). I have put them on my drawing table (oak, corian (‘ivory’)), in order to come as close as possible to the real and corporeal situation in the carpenter’s workshop, and to the smell of the construction site. I became aware that architecture was about building, and that building was in substance, and that substance was treated by the hand of the craftsman.

− The client: I have a good memory of the collaboration with the client, who had granted me the time to come through the patient process of making.

− The carpenter: I organised, and experienced, cabinet making was ‘a good making sense’, both emotionally and materially (physically). My carpenter had just lost his 15 year old daughter, and I felt that this project could help him not to forget her. I was almost constantly present in the carpenter’s workshop, situated in my village. I rode down there by bike. In the workshop, during the work, my carpenter was listening to classical music: Gustav Mahler’s Second Symphony (the Resurrection symphony)(Mahler 1888-1894), or Mahler’s Kindertotenlieder (Mahler 1905). In the meantime, we were talking about music, and about architecture, but not through grand ideological statements, but by explaining swallowtail connections at the corners of wooden drawers.

− Difficult design brief: I succesfully had completed a very challenging design brief with difficult design parameters: a complex structural intervention, the improvement of the acoustic quality and difficult access to the urban construction site, and all of it had to be fulfilled in a financially adventurous and strictly monitored construction process. Moreover, the client’s ophtalmology practice on the ground floor had to remain open all the time.

− The English Garden Landscape:

because of its possible meaning for this research:

− At the moment of selection, I presumed that the meaning of the aforementioned elements for the practice could coincide with what it possibly could mean for this research. So the elements of importance collected there, are so for the practice as well as for the research.

− These elements with meaning for the practice contribute to the soul of my work, in which I became involved as a creator (curator), not at a distance, but amidst the action.

− I could feel that this project was close to what I thought I wanted to investigate, and that it also could help to more accurately formulate my research theme.
2.3.2 / 2-8  


This project is a thorough transformation of a free standing family house (the mother, the father, and two daughters) in the suburbs of Ghent. The original house is an early project built by architect Juliaan Lampens in the 1950’s. I was his apprentice between July 1984 and early 1987.

I have opened up a series of subsequent spaces so as to form a continuous and modulated spatial sequence, and I have added a narrow extension all along the south side of the house so as to create an in-between space—a porch—between the interior and the garden. In the yard, the modulated spatial sequence of the existing spaces and the new in-between space culminate in a greenhouse that opens up the house towards the landscape.

In the landscape-as-section, I have lifted the floor level of the house slightly on a concrete sockle, thus demonstrating the way by which to withstand the eventual floodings of the nearby river Scheldt, and giving the house a sense of levitation.

Through an extensive set of meticulous drawings, I have designed the built-in furniture (the kitchen, the study, the mediatheque, the fireplace), inserted strategically into the house, thus leaving a sea of free space.

In the First Interrogation of the Practice, I have selected this project:

because of its meaning for my practice:
– the original house had been designed and built by architect Lampens, in whose studio I have been an apprentice between July 1984 and early 1987. I was both honoured and anxious to insert my architecture into the existing topography of spaces designed by my master. The original plan had a rigid modulation, on which I have contrasted by my configuration of the plan (see plan);
– the plan of this house is very vivid with characteristics of a landscape garden in which one can wander and hide. The surrounding garden imbricates with the glazed interior spaces through the concave configuration of the plan that has been inspired by Alvaro Siza’s *Beires House*, Povoa de Varzim, Portugal (Siza 1973-1976) and his *Boa Nova Tea House*, Leïça da Palmeira, Portugal (Siza 1958-1963), that I had seen during a trip to Portugal in that period.
– I have designed and built an extension for House VDA-DP (1998-2002) around the same period as the Summerhouse, in which I had to take the risk of the rising water seriously into account. House VDA-DP is situated in the valley of the river Scheldt, in Belgium. There, I raised the extension subtly, making use of a carefully moulded concrete sockle that on its edges cantilevers in order to withstand eventual floodings of the river with grace;
– I have designed and built this project with the precision of a piece of furniture, with a focus on the concept of section, more specifically focusing on how this house-as-section had to be inserted in the topography of the landscape-as-section. In that respect, it has been the section that has driven this design process, much more than the plan has done;
– I have paid special attention to the timber, and to a sophisticated system of sliding window-doors, made by the carpenter who has done most of my eidetic works;
– I have designed an extraordinary interior with built-in furniture: a kitchen, a study, a fireplace, a mediatheque, through an exquisite set of drawings in pencil on paper.

because of its possible meaning for the research:
– I assumed that the fact that the house has been designed and built with the precision of a piece of furniture could become an important element in the research. As such, it shares this similarity with the CL2-Appartments (1997-2002), that immediately came before it. I assumed that the question would be which of the two projects I would choose to investigate further.

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20 See Section 2.3.2 / 2-11: Summerhouse (2001-2004), and Section 2.3.4 / 6-1: Summerhouse (2001-2004).
I finally have chosen the CL2-Apartment, because it came before House VDA-DP, and because it had that extra design component of 'chronology on the drawing table'.

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21 See Section 2.3.4 / 4-1: Chronology on the Drawing Table.
This project is a family house (the mother, the father, the daughter) in the countryside of Flanders. I have made the archetype of 'a house'. The house has two volumes: a closed 'block of substance' (wood) for the house ('the mother'), and an open structure for the carport ('the father'). The structure and the spatial modulation of the house completely coincide, and both are as simple as they are effective. This results in a very compact house, very spacious though, partly due to the glass floor above the central dining table, which permits sunlight to penetrate deeply into the house.

As for the carport, I have developed a space frame with tubular steel columns and wind bracings, and DOKA beams normally used to make scaffoldings and formwork in construction practice.

In the First Interrogation of the Practice, I have selected this project:

because of its meaning for my practice:
- for the design of this house, I have thoroughly studied construction practice in wood: the North American and Scandinavian traditions, as well as new practices in Central Europe. As for the latter categorie, I then have profoundly studied the designs, and the technical detail drawings produced by Burkhalter & Sumi, who had an exhibition in deSingel in Antwerp between 15 March 1996 and 21 April 1996. I was very impressed by their work, for instance by their Economic School, Laufenburg, Switzerland (Burkhalter & Sumi 1992), their Hotel Zürichberg, Zürich, Switzerland (Burkhalter & Sumi 1995), and their way of working, and especially their way of drawing, has been a good incentive for me as to go on with my meticulous drawings.
- I have designed and built this house with the precision of a piece of furniture, for which I could rely on a young and very skilled team of carpenters;
- this project for me has been an early work in which I could sense that there was a relationship between the process of making (construction practice) and the generation of the poetic image;
- I have enjoyed the process of drawing all the details on full scale, not only to communicate them, but also to learn to master them;

I have enjoyed the process of making on the construction site;
I had a good contact with the clients, who have understood the importance of giving creative freedom to their architect, who, in return, has mastered the budget appropriately;
this project has been selected for the *Supernova Exhibition* in Brussels in 2000\(^\text{26}\), where my Dutch client has noticed it. Subsequently, he has contacted me for the Summerhouse (2001-2004)(see Section 2.3.2 / 2-12, and Section 2.3.4 / 6-1), for the Housing Project in Amersfoort (2005-2007), and for The boathouse 1 and The Boathouse 2 (2008-2012)(see Section 2.4.3). This exhibition has been the second recognition for my work on a national level (after the competition I had won for the Social Housing Project in Ghent in (1988-1989)(see Section 2.3.2 / 2-1)).

because of its possible meaning for the research:
- technically, this project has has been the pilot project, the laboratory, for a number of works to come, through which I then have learned the translation of construction practice into the poetic image: firstly, for the Summerhouse (2001-2004)(see Section 2.3.2 / 2-12, and Section 2.3.4 / 6-1), and then for WoSho (1986-2013)(see Section 2.4.6). I presumed that this aspect might be worth an investigation;
- I was confident that the two aforementioned projects that have (technically and poetically) come forth from this project would leave me the opportunity to shine a light on the further elaborated versions of it, leaving me the possibility to show it in this First Interrogation of the Practice.

\(^{26}\) See Section 4.1.6: Exhibitions.
\(^{27}\) House VD-DN (1997-1999): detail drawings window sections, scale 1/1, pencil and chinese ink on thin white paper and tracing paper.
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This project is the combination of a transport business, for which a large truck garage had to be incorporated at street level, and a house. For the garage, I already had consumed the total footprint allowed by local building regulations. So the house had to be situated on top of the large garage. Doing so, the house was remote from the landscape. This absence of landscape has been replaced by a designed trajectory upwards to the house, ending in an overview on the surrounding sloping landscape.

The bottom of the building is a set of massive volumes in brick, incorporating the large garage, its servant spaces, and the compact private entrance where the ramps upwards takes a start. The top, then, is an open umbrella structure made of slim steel tubes—a further development of the tubular system I had designed for the carport of House VD-DN—\(^{33}\) that carry a thin lightweight “umbrella” roof in zinc. This open structure has been left glazed for a 180 degree view on the surrounding sloping landscape.

In the First Interrogation of the Practice, I have selected this project:

because of its meaning for my practice:
- this building has a complex yet surprising circulation system of corridors and walkways through the house that replaces the absence of a garden nearby the living area. A such, the landscape that is visible in the distance is brought within walking distance, into the building;
- I have made an elaborate study of the steel structure, and subsequently I have cooperated intensely with the steel supplier in order to produce it properly, and everything succeeded very well;

because of its possible meaning for the research:
- I was excited by my set of drawings, especially by that special longitudinal section that showed the elevation as well as the sections at different places in the building in one view. I wanted to further investigate this concept of drawing, and find out what it could mean for construction practice.

\(^{33}\) See Section 2.3.2 / 2-9: House VD-DN (1997-1999).

\(^{34}\) House ST (1997-1999): photograph and design process of tubular steel roof structure.
2.3.2 / 2-11  *Summerhouse* (2001-2004)

This project is a small house (with a footprint of only 6 x 6 meters) to observe nature in a preserved nature area in The Netherlands. The house has completely been made in wood. It stands in the meadowland between mainland Holland and the Ijsselmeer (the former Zuiderzee—South Sea). A firm wooden palisade carries the wooden volume of the house, that can completely barricade itself by pulling up the four terraces—one at each side of the house—up. In an inverse movement, the house can completely open itself towards the surrounding nature.

I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because of its meaning for the practice:

- it has been my first international project, coming forth from the second recognition of my work on a national level (Supernova Exhibition, Brussels 2000, see Section 4.1.6: Exhibitions).
- I have made a very rewarding set of drawings in pencil on paper, another ‘draftsman’s trance’;
- I have enjoyed the numerous and very intensive construction site meetings, and the craftsmanship of the foreman on the construction site who has demonstrated the possible precision with which a wooden house can be made (with the precision of a piece of furniture);

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I have a good relationship with the client, that has resulted in two more projects forthcoming from this project: a housing project in Amersfoort (5 houses), and The Boathouse 1 and The boathouse 2 (see Section 2.4.3);
the client has strongly contributed to my belief and my abilities in construction practice as the generator of the poetic image.

because of its possible meaning for the research:
- I presumed a relationship between this project in a flat landscape, and other projects I have made on sloping hills, and through this research I wanted to find out what exactly constituted this relationship;
- I presumed a relationship between this house and working with wood as a construction material that enables to build with the precision of a piece of furniture, and other projects where I have done so, which I wanted to investigate (craftsmanship).
This project is a terraced family house (the mother, the father, three sons, a daughter) in a dense urban context. It is the materialised concept of section: a simple set of horizontal floor planes between two parallel prefabricated concrete walls. The result is the visible construction practice that has made the house. In this concrete mainframe, I have inserted a wooden subframe of compactly inserted built-in furniture: the central kitchen, the wooden container of the store room, two wooden frames that divide the bedrooms all along the void that reaches into the attic, and a set of stairs. The rest is space. This project is the hinge between the 17 years of practice that preceded it (synthesis), and the subsequent projects through which I would further develop this specific construction practice (prognosis).

This project has been the turning point in my practice: the moment in which the result of the whole process has become the visible construction practice that has made it, and that produces the poetic image.

From the early beginning of the First Interrogation of the Practice, it has been clear to me that this project should be selected, because of its meaning for the practice:
- This project has been a synthesis of what came before in the practice, and a prognosis for projects to come later, when the practice could evolve, due to the construction process of this house, which has been a substantial learning experience for me as an architect. As a prognosis and as a synthesis, this is the hinge project of the practice;
- This house has been a synthesis of what came before in the practice, due to a structured review of the body of work in the year 2000, when I participated in the *Supernova* exhibition[^1], with a focus on the practices of young architects in Belgium. I would exhibit an overview of my work, which had been peer

[^1]: *Supernova* exhibition (2000).
reviewed and selected in a first round by a board of architects that curated the exhibition. Most of them were either teaching architectural design, curating exhibitions on art or architecture, or publishing on the subject.

I could grant this selection process the amount of time it deserved, and, long before the Ph.D, these intense months have been the first opportunity to look back on my past practice, finding characteristics in the work itself, and detecting gaps that had to be filled in by later work. All this enabled me to (re)position myself as an architect in the field, by comparing early work to later work, by comparing the work with the work of other architects, and to raise my architectural practice to a next level of competence through better understanding. The outcome of my personal selection was a book with 29 projects coming forth from about 17 years of practice, presented through plans, sections, technical detail drawings, photographs of scale models and built results. Out of these 29 projects, I further have selected two for a more thorough exhibition: House VDV-C (1990-1992 / unbuilt)\(^\text{38}\), and House VD-DN (1997-1999)\(^\text{39}\).

This review of the practice culminated in the design of House DGDR, of which the design process had already taken a start in the fall of 1999 with the first preliminary sketches that had lead to a first version of the design. This design has been rejected, not by the client, but by myself, even after the client had encouraged me to go on with it. It has taken some time to convince the client not to insist, because it made no sense to force me to do it: I wanted to make another design, which I finally did.

The creation process of the final design, then, took a real start during the summer of 2000, in the middle of the preparation process for the *Supernova* exhibition, that opened in early September 2000. It is fair to say that the profound review of the past practice, combined with (then) 17 years of experience in construction practice, had generated understandings which I soon have transported into the design process of House DG-DR.

- My frequent presence at the construction site—sometimes twice a day—was very rewarding, improving the quality of the work through a constant dialogue with the contractor and the carpenter. I was on my way from a distant commanding architect in the early stages of my practice, to a direct involvement with substance, the process of making, and the people who make it;
- I had a good contact with the clients, who were very open minded, and with a good sense of humour;
- I started rehearsing my ambition to adopt handcrafted construction practice in the course of the design process in House B (2005-2007)\(^\text{40}\). I would adopt handcrafted construction practice from the early beginning of the design process, and I had felt I was taking a substantial step in my mastery of substance as an architect. This house has been a prognosis of what would come after it in the practice, due to my gradual development of a robust set of technical details;
- I have developed this set of details by making a set of 43 full scale drawings, which I nurse in my archive. Again: a draftsman’s trance.

because of its meaning for the research:

- all the reasons I have mentioned about the meaning of this house for the practice apply to explain its meaning for the research. Moreover, the project itself has been the result of a first interrogation of the practice, long before the First Interrogation of the Practice of this Ph.D., so I can say that research has generated the hinge project of my practice.
- the house has been generated through its section. Later in my research, the Concept of Section would to appear to be the fundamental characteristic of my work.

\(^{37}\) *Supernova* was an architecture exhibition, as a part of the *Brussels European Cultural Capital* festival in the year 2000.

\(^{38}\) See Section 2.3.4 / 2.

\(^{39}\) See Section 2.3.2 / 2-9.

\(^{40}\) See Section 2.3.2 / 2-17, and Section 2.4.4.
2.3.2 / 2-13  House VAE (2000-2002)

This project is the transformation of a terraced family house (the mother, the father, the daughter, the son) in an urban context by replacing a dilapidated addition to the house by a set of volumes in solid brick, in which I have installed a new kitchen, and a terrace. The configuration of the brick volumes provides an intimate corner in the dense set of adjacent urban gardens. The raised terrace—due to the topography of the landscape-as-section—adds to the volumetric play of the brick volumes.

I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because of its meaning for the practice:
- I had a very good relationship with my client. I knew him from primary school, but I had never seen him ever since, and meeting again was nice, and we have cooperated with the fun and humour of boys, and with the seriousness and efficiency of men;
- a very reliable set of drawings on a large scale, made with a sharp pencil on thin white paper, has successfully guided the construction process;
- the cooperation with the contractors has been very constructive;
- this has been the first building in which I have exploited the nakedness of normal construction materials to that extent: masonry in concrete blocks, in situ poured concrete, steel, screws and bolts that have been left in the sight;
- despite the (sub)urban context, the house had a special relationship with the topography. The level of the garden was situated more than 100 cm below the floor level of the house and the terrace. For this reason, I have made the terrace as a massive block of concrete that emerges from the grass of the garden;
- despite the compactness of my intervention, the result is very spatious.

because of its possible meaning for the research:
- I presumed that the nakedness of construction materials in this project had triggered my later applications of this principle, and I wanted to investigate that;
- I presumed a relationship between the landscape-as-section of this project with this aspect in my other projects, but I could not exactly say what it was, and I wanted to find out through the investigations of this Ph.D.
House VAE (2000-2002): construction site photographs. Except from the floor, the photograph on the right shows the completed project.
2.3.2 / 2-14  House D-R (2004-2007)

This project is an extension of a family house (the mother, the father, two children) in a blurry suburban context. During the construction process, my man-client, who is a biologist, has become a landscape architect. My woman-client works with little children. Creating for a landscape architect and a woman who works with children, I thought I should re-instate the landscape, that seemed too distant on this site, and liberate their daily lives from the depressing closedness of the spaces in their old house. I have designed a landscape to live in, inserting it in the existing landscape-as-section by subtly excavating the small suburban garden (partly, where the extension would come, and where the terrace would come) by 45 cm—making the comfortable height to sit on the ridge of the excavation and by doing so, giving a humane dimension to my excavation—so as to obtain the exact floor level that connects the floor level of the existing house with the level of the suburban garden, which is the level of the existing topography. These interventions result in an open ‘playground’, protected by only two walls and glass, and the surrounding gardens. I have also transported the centre of domestic life from the original house to the extension, which—as a landscape—has become the epicenter between the old house and the garden.

I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because of its meaning for the practice:

− I am fond of this project. This project was ongoing simultaneously with House B (2005-2007); 44
− my ambition to adopt handcrafted construction practice (that I had rehearsed on in House DG-DR) 45 from the early beginning in design process (in House DG-DR I had adopted handcrafted construction practice in the course of its design process), had succeeded, and I had felt that this was a substantial step in my mastery of substance as an architect;
− my frequent presence at the construction site was very rewarding, improving the quality of the work through constant dialogue with the contractor and the carpenter. I had come a long way from a distant commanding architect in the early stages of my practice, to a direct involvement with substance and the process of making;
− this project has a very consistent set of plans and sections, all collected in a booklet on an A2 size, which has proven to be very practical at the construction site, for all the parties involved. I had long hesitated to turn to computer drawing, and in this project I have done it very well, by developing my personal way to do it;
− the combination of naked construction materials—concrete, steel, cellular concrete blocs, wooden afzelia window frames that are pieces of furniture in their own right—had become as I had imagined it, thus proving that my estimations about combinations of materials during the design process have become reliable;
− I had a good relationship with the clients, who have trusted me, also in the most difficult moments when it went wrong with the floor, and due to this trust we have worked out a better solution than the original one.

because of its possible meaning for the research:

− images of the construction site are still inspiring me to go further in the use of these materials and building techniques. I have the feeling I can still make progress in this kind of construction practice, and perhaps the investigations through this Ph.D can help me to bring this kind of construction practice to a next level;

44 See Section 2.3.2 /2-17, and Section 2.4.4.
45 See Section 2.3.2 / 2-12, and Section 2.3.4 / 5.
I wanted to better understand my growing involvement with substance and the process of making, and my ever improving collaboration with the contractor and the carpenter.
This project is a free standing house in the countryside of Flanders. It is situated in a flat landscape. The street side is oriented towards the northeast, the courtyard towards the southwest. I have drawn the house with the precision of a piece of furniture, with which I wanted to build it. I have designed it as 'a wall to live in' that immures a courtyard, of which the interior spaces are a part. The house has not been built.

I have selected this project in the First Interrogation of the Practice:

because of its meaning for the practice:
− the project has remained unbuilt, and I have not come over it yet;
− the project has been made through designing with substance by making chronological drawings from the very beginning of the design process, that I have simulated as a construction process as much as possible. I have tried to become the making carpenter here, instead of the dreaming architect;
the project is one of the few cases that I have designed (‘simulatingly built’) in a flat landscape-as-section. Although this topography was rather unusual for me, I could soon feel ‘at home’ in it;
− I have enjoyed making the vertical longitudinal section on scale 1/20 in pencil on almost white thin paper. I have especially enjoyed drawing that tree the has a special relationship with the house. I have also discovered a precise drawing, made with a sharp pencil on brown packing paper, because this paper suggests the kind of materiality I had in mind for this house. I love to draw with a sharp pencil on paper. It is the thing I like doing most in my work, next to making scale models in wood;
− I have made a very refined scale model on scale 1/200 in thin paper with a hint of color.

because of its possible meaning for the research:
− I was very fascinated, and surprised, by the efficiency with which a sincere and consequent application of construction practice and designing in substance had generated a poetic image;
− I wanted to further investigate the direct and understandable relationship between the application of the dimensions and the measures of existing construction materials and techniques and the scale of a tall standing man. Through this research, I wanted to bring this understanding to a next level;
− I presumed a relationship between this project in a flat landscape, and other projects I have made on sloping hills, and through this research I wanted to find out what exactly constituted this relationship;
− I wanted to know more about the relationship between the sections of columns that stand next to sections of window frames.
2.3.2 / 2-16  House B-M (2003-2006 / unbuilt)

This project is a free standing family house in the countryside of Flanders. It is situated in a sloping landscape, and I have adopted this landscape-as-section as the basic design characteristic of this house. The house has a central living space, a low volume one can look over from the street side of the house, in order not to obstruct the view on the magnificent landscape. Then two massive tower-like volumes, in which the kitchen (below) and a study (on top) (tower 1), and the bedrooms (tower 2), flank this central room. The house has been invented by simply stacking massive cyclopic stones so as to form a wall—a wall to live in—that immures the central living space. Subsequently, one large wide angle window turns this protected living spaces into a part of the landscape.

In the First Interrogation of the Practice, I have selected this project:
because of its meaning for the practice:
− the project was very recent at the moment of selection, and it has remained unbuilt. It has been inserted in the landscape-as-section in a very specific way that I had not done before: beneath the street level, in a ‘one man Depth’, which was ‘a relevant step’ in my practice. I thought I could give it a second life by selecting it.
  I had made drawings of this house that satisfied me: sketches, sections, elevations that added meaning to my architectural practice;
− I had designed it in real substance, with the strict chronology of the construction site in mind. In my view, this also added meaning to my current architectural practice;
− I was obsessed with the eye level of a tall standing man (I will explain my concept of the tall standing man further in the Ph.D).

because of its possible meaning for this research:
− this house has been dug in—excavated—partially in the landscape-as-section, making use of the inclination of the site. In this characteristic, I presumed a possible element of interest for this research, because it connected the idea with real substance—earth;
− I had the feeling that this house was one in a consistent series of other, related, but also slightly different works, but I didn’t know how and I wanted to find out.

Later in the research, its Concept of Section, and its insertion in the landscape, have appeared to have triggered for The Meaning of Life\(^\text{46}\), and for Etude.\(^\text{47}\)

\(^{46}\) See Section 2.3.5 / 3.
\(^{47}\) See Section 2.3.5 / 4.
2.3.2 / 2-17  House B (2005-2007)

This project is a family house (the mother, the daughter, the son) in a suburban context, on the edge of town. The domestic life hides behind a closed wall that faces the street. Within this immured enclosure, one wide angle window looks into an old forest. Three concrete columns carry the low roof, and the columns are reminiscent of the stems of trees in the forest. The result is the visible construction practice that has made the house, in the slipstream of my development of this construction methods in House DG-DR (1999-2004), and almost simultaneously with the construction site of House D-R. Images of this construction site keep haunting me, and have inspired the development of The Haystack Gallery, a speculative design made in the core of this Ph.D.

In the First Interrogation of the Practice, I have selected this project:

because of its meaning for the practice:
- I was fond of this project; this project was ongoing simultaneously with House D-R (2004-2007);
- I was fond of a set of technical sketches I had made, of which I had felt they were a landmark in the evolution of my practice;
- my ambition to adopt handcrafted construction practice, that I had rehearsed on in House DG-DR, from the early beginning in the design process (in House DG-DR I had adopted handcrafted construction practice in the course of its design process), had succeeded, and I had felt that this was a substantial step in my mastery of substance as an architect;
- at the street side, I had played games with the eye level, I wanted the house to look like a very low brick wall, and it took all my technical skills to succeed in this, but I did;
- my frequent presence at the construction site was very rewarding, improving the quality of the work through a constant dialogue with the contractor and the carpenter. I had come a long way from a distant commanding architect in the early stages of my practice, to a direct involvement with substance and the process of making;
- the site was a rather unusual and dense combination with meaning in the series of meaningless sites I often had to work on. It was in the lowland, at the edge of town, and at the back of the site a wooded hill (full of wells) emerged;
- this nearby old forest had inspired me to design the main structure of the house as three columns, in which I saw the extension of the wood 'had walked inside the house'.

because of its possible meaning for this research:
- there was a sense of urgency in my appreciation for the set of technical sketches, but I didn’t exactly know why, and I wanted to find out;
- images of the construction site, when I looked at them after completion, kept haunting me as they seemed prophetic for (my) future architectural practice, and I wanted to find out what exactly it was that was haunting me;

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48 See Section 2.3.2 / 2-12: House DG-DR (1999-2004), and Section 2.3.4 / 5: House DG-DR (1999-2004).
49 See Section 2.3.2 / 2-14: House D-R (2004-2007) and Section 2.3.4 / 6-2.
50 See Section 2.4.5: The Haystack Gallery (2001-2012).
51 See Section 2.3.2 / 2-14.
− I wanted to better understand my growing involvement with substance and the process of making, and my ever improving collaboration with the contractor and the carpenter;
− the density of lowland and hill coming together on my site kept fascinating me, and I wanted to find out what it was.
2.3.2 / 2-18 WoSho (1986-2013)

This is our house, where we live and work. The house originally has been built in 1898. We have started the gradual transformation of it in the fall of 1992, and it is still ongoing. It has been, and still is, my permanent laboratory, the place that has taught me the most about construction practice.

This project, in fact, consists of a number of sub projects (see below), due to ‘the financial situation of the (young) architect’. This disadvantage has proven to be an opportunity, in that it has saved me from the mistakes I would have made as a young architect.

The result is a balanced set of well considered interventions that pay tribute to the structural and spatial modulation of the house, that only at a few places has been altered in order to instate new vista’s and perspectives through the house and into the landscape.

The house is situated in the countryside of Flanders. It is surrounded by a small garden in front where the approach to the house is, and that mutates into an immured old garden, that subsequently becomes on old orchard ‘immured’ with hawthorn, that subsequently becomes a new orchard which we planted in the fall of 1998, that subsequently becomes part of the open and sloping landscape.

In the First Interrogation of the Practice, I have selected this project:

because of its meaning for the practice:

− this is my own project, the place where we live and work. It contains:
  − two dwellings: one for us, and one for my wife’s mother;
  − my wife’s fashion workshop (in which she employs two women with whom she does the production of prototypes, fashion shows and first serial productions of (mostly) Belgian fashion designers);
  − my architect’s studio;
  − a small facility for hobby ‘farming’, I have:
    - four sheep
    - an old orchard
    - a new orchard
    - an old garden with old and rare trees in it.
− I was lucky not to have the financial resources twenty years ago, otherwise I would have spoiled the qualities of the house by wanting to demonstrate ‘what a good architect I was’. For financial reasons, I had to split up the construction process in several stages, according to my financial situation at the different stages of construction. This has given me the time and the opportunity to slowly adapt to the house, to patiently unveil its secrets. Roughly, these stages have been:
  − reworking the garden between 1986 and 1987, that had become a jungle at the moment we arrived. We have carefully respected all the old trees in it;
  − curing and healing a number of old fruit trees (very ancient and rare species of pears, apples and cherries) by a specialist ‘tree-churgeon’;
  − the refurbishment of my wife’s mother’s ‘wing’ between 1986 and 1988;
  − the refurbishment of our ‘wing’ between 1993 and 2010;
  − replacing all the technical supplies of the house: electricity, water piping, heating system, alarm system;

52 The same year as Melsetter House by William Lethaby (Lethaby 1898). There are similarities between our house, and Lethaby’s house on the Orkneys: the way it evolves from an intimate interior space into the surrounding landscape, so as to form an estate with it.
− replacing all the doors and windows;
− completely re-doing the sewer system;
− the living space and the sleeping/dressing space (that temporarily has been my architect's studio);
− the kitchen;
− the fashion workshop;
− the courtyard;
− the pond;
− for the same financial reasons, I have done most of the work myself, together with my father;
− the house has been built in 1898. It has been my constant test case, my laboratory that allowed me to dream about possible improvements on the house, and to make those concepts in real matter. Sometimes, this is about ideas I would not want to do for the first time with somebody else's budget. For instance:
  − in the entrance, I (successfully) tried out built-in wooden furniture without any finishing, untreated (no varnish, no oil, no wax);
  − combining, in that small and narrow entrance space, a meeting desk for 2 people, a wardrobe, a post sorting system (to sort out the mail for my wife's mother, our private mail, the mail for my wife's fashion workshop, and the mail for my architecture studio), a rest room, and a passage that connects the two dwellings and the two businesses on a surface of merely 5 square meters. And it works very well;
  − I successfully tried out wooden claddings that come very close to the ground on the outer walls of my wife's fashion workshop. This is against 'the rules' of Belgian timber constructions, that prescribe that this kind of cladding should be separated from the ground by at least 30 cm;
  − combining a study, a living room, a library, a reception room in one room;
  − using the kitchen to receive clients, both my wife's and mine;
  − making the courtyard floor perfectly horizontal amidst three buildings, with the risk of overflow of rainwater, which did not occur by the permeability of the brick flooring.

because of its possible meaning for the research:
− doing most of the work on the transformation of our house myself has unquestionably contributed to my profound understandings of the process of making. It has triggered my awareness that to make can be the generator of to dream, and the more I have been working on our house, the more this understanding could begin to settle, at first neutrally in terms of: “yes I know”, but gradually also in my mind as a designing architect. Between 1992, the moment we arrived here, and now, and together with my architectural practice and the ever growing interest in the whereabouts of the work of architects I admire and who contribute to my argument, the time I have spent on working on this house has turned me into a completely different architect. I wanted to spend my research time on this growing understanding of the connection between to make and to dream, and on making explicit this understanding;
− of course we did not do all the work ourselves. Especially all the work that has been done for the fashion workshop, the courtyard, and the pond, and all the technical installations, have been done by contractors. Given the fact that we have lived here throughout the whole construction process, I have experienced the advantages of being constantly present at my own construction site, up to the point that for some elements, like the roof overhangs in the courtyard, I have decided on them during their construction process, in a constant dialogue with my carpenters. I have then begun to understand the potential of being amidst construction actions as an architect, and subsequently I have begun to transport this understanding into other creation processes for other projects, hence I have transported it to the centre of this research.