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

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Johan R. Van Den Berghe
09 September 2012.
2.3.3 / 2-2  A Journey into Memory and Imagination

I spent many minutes and seconds in my grandmother’s house, and I can recall so many of them.
My mother used to take me there—to that little town in the plain, my personal downtown. Coming in through the front door, I was overwhelmed by the smell of good cooking. My grandmother could prepare rabbit in red wine like nobody else could do ever since. My awareness of the position of the house in the dense urban fabric was absolute and comforting and cozy. Contrary to home, where I also liked to play in the proximity of a small brook that cut through the flank of a hill, the urban atmosphere where my grandmother lived was very vivid and busy.

Coming in from the street and standing in the doorway—I see you standing there, little man!—I looked into an endless rectangular space like in a Renaissance central perspective, from the short side of the rectangle, with the vanishing point at infinity. My family used to call this space the corridor. In my infant central perspective, it looked endlessly inviting to run through, me and my cousins and nieces, yelling loudly, and almost driving my grandmother to insanity. Up to the height of approximately 120 centimeters, the walls were clad with glossy rectangular ceramic tiles—exactly the ones I recognise in the Paris underground. The tiles amplified the echo’s of our shouting.

1 House DG-DR (1999-2004): central perspective, coming in from the street.
On the right side, the wall seemed endless. Almost halfway, there was a wardrobe. Coats, hats on top of a shelf, umbrella's and a set of wooden walking sticks, some of them with an ivory handle. Further, three or four black and white photographs adorned the endlessness of the wall. The black parts of the photographs, and the shadows and other Darknesses, had been enhanced by the photographer through his mastery of black and white photography. My grandfather was very professional as a photographer.

On my left side, I could see four doors in a row: the first door gave access to the front room at the street side of the house. The second door to the stairs that led to the basement, a next door to the so called middle room, and a fourth door to a small patio. At the end of the corridor, in the far distance, the kitchen door closed the short end of the corridor. All these doors were painted in the color of stained blood. When I looked closely, there were millions of little cracks in the paint. The first three doors had a frame, with a transverse horizontal connection situated in their lower middle, and thinner wooden panels enclosed within these frames. The doorhandles felt loose, but handling them went smoothly. Although each door had a keyhole, none of the doors appeared to have a key. If they were closed, they looked closed enough so as to keep me out.

The end of the corridor was top lit. There, a diffuse light was seeping through the yellowish translucent ceiling panels, and gushing all over everything, evoking the impression that the sun was always shining.

I had finally attained the kitchen door, and I opened it. Due to the long corridor, the kitchen was remote from the street, hidden in the infinite Depth of the house, at the vanishing point of the central perspective. Here, silence was King, only interrupted by the wooden cuckoo clock that came to life every half an hour (two cuckoo's on the hour, only one cuckoo on the half hour). The confusing figures on the cement tiles of the kitchen floor are still imprinted in my mind. The ceramic plinths were glossy and pale blue. On top they had the section of a quarter circle that was separated from their flat surface by a deep horizontal rim. I would recall their pale blue colour, years later, when I watched Marnie. From there, a white tile cladding reached up to the ceiling. The tiles were shiny, with an infinite number of little cracks in them, which formed gracious lines and weird intersecting figures. I gazed at them endlessly. Although the cracks were apparent, I could not feel them when I caressed the tiles with my fingertips.

The glossy oil painted kitchen ceiling was very low. Once, Santa Claus had brought me an airplane with flashing lights and batteries and everything, and when he stretched his arm, my father could fly that plane as high as the kitchen ceiling. In the middle, a circular neontube zoomingly enlightened the room. After it had just been extinguished, it kept glowing a little in the dark for a while. Then I was afraid of it, and I did not dare to look at it.

On the chimney, a frame with an eye caught in a triangle, and rays of celestial light stretching out from the middle eye over the full surface of the panel, had a text on it that said: “God ziet u, hier vloekt men niet!”, which means: “God sees you, in this house we do not curse!” To me, this image was the extension of the long corridor, and I think I then became obsessed with the concept of central perspective, anxiously looking at Alfred Hitchcock’s Vertigo (Hitchcock 1958), or Andrea Mantegna’s Lamentation over the Dead Christ (Mantegna 1490), with its perspectival foreshortenings, suggesting a frightening Depth, or the upside

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2 Marnie, from the film by Alfred Hitchcock (Hitchcock 1964), had pale blue eyes and an early 1960's air, just like the pale blue plinths I had seen in my grandmother's kitchen, in the early 1960's.
down version of it in Salvador Dali’s *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* (Dali 1951). Next to the frame, a black crucifix carried an ivory white figure of Christ who looked into the room with pale blue eyes. My grandmother, although very shy by nature, was vehemently Catholic, regularly warning me of the fury of God, coming from above, if I misbehaved. At the feet of the crucifix, in the Darkness of the inglenook, an ever burning stove represented the glowing satan, but at the same time it heated the kitchen.

My grandmother used to make tapestry. It was done on a brownish canvas cloth with a rather wide mesh, through which she wove little strings of wool, of which she had a million colours. The canvas was stretched in a sophisticated wooden framework—“my métier”—she called it—that was standing on two wooden pegs. The working surface was carefully cantilevered in order to work on it in a sustainable position. She made them all: Vermeer, Van Gogh, Odilon Redon. *Le Radeau de la Méduse* (Géricault 1819). How wild is the sea, Grannie?

She taught me about the subtleties of colour, and which ones to combine (and which ones never to combine, with her finger pointed upwards!). She had a preference for greens, for a particular kind of green, leaning to the point where the green just did not become a little blue—or did it? Sometimes, she made me look twice …

This métier was standing in the kitchen, next to the door towards the so-called DishHouse, a little room where the real cooking took place: a stainless steel sink with warm water, a gass stove with three gas burners and an oven underneath, a noisy electric waterpump in the back. The dish house produced promising odours of culinary miracles from behind the only half closed door: smell, taste, food, coming together in one instant, with one eye focused on a glass of red wine, the other on an original Géricault, and still both eyes were not conflicting, even when we got drunk, occasionally. Yeah, life can be worse than hell.

At the same time we were listening to my grandfather, rehearsing on his trumpet—he founded three brass bands—or playing one of his two tape recorders. Mahler’s *Lied von der Erde* (Mahler 1908-1909), Schubert’s *Winterreise* (Schubert 1827). Purcell, Sir Henry, which was lovely.

Sometimes we found ourselves, breathlessly listening to stories about the continuous allied bomb raids on the nearby train station in 1943 that lit the night skies from black to orange, or to that one time story—the nasty one—about a German tank commander in 1941, burning like a torch, running through the empty street at night, howling, knocking on closed anxious doors, shouting for his mother, no one to answer, nowhere to go, roasted to coal, and finally remaining silent and dark, the worst silence ever, the darkest of Darknesses, which was not lovely at all.

There was a strange way of looking out from the kitchen, gazing into the small urban garden that was surrounded by brick walls about one man high, behind which—nearby—solid brick volumes of adjacent buildings—houses and a textile factory—arose with almost no windows. It must have been dark in there. An old greenhouse separated the kitchen from the garden. Both the roof and the wall of the greenhouse were made of very slender steel rods with a T-section that carried small glass panes that overlapped like brick tiles on a roof. In the overlaps between the glass panes, moss was beginning to grow. Capillarity. Abundant presence of light. An adequate temperature in summer. The T-sections had been curved in order to make the transition between the slight inclination of the glass roof and the vertical glass wall towards the urban garden. I still wonder how the smith has managed to bend every T-section in order to...
obtain bows with the same radius. Anyway, I could see he had succeeded, showing me that creating a wonder through craftsmanship was possible and opening my imagination to a myriad of opportunities in architecture.

The greenhouse must have been added later to the kitchen. I could see this by the sections of the window frames between the kitchen and the greenhouse—between two interior spaces, normal people don’t do that!—and by the window sill, which was clearly of a type used for exterior walls.

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4 My fascination for sections of window frames must have started there, combined with my grandfather’s activities as a furniture maker, mostly in wood, a few times in metal (steel, brass, zinc). Inventing smart sections for window frames inspired by the process of their making occupies a large part of my design time. Mostly in wood—it can hardly be otherwise in my case—it is also one of the first details I check when I visit the works of architects I admire and whose work contributes to my research theme. I highly estimate Gunnar Asplund’s fascination for window frames, since Gilbert Decouvreur, a teacher and colleague at Sint-Lucas who is an expert in Asplund, told me about it on the occasion of a visit we paid to Asplund’s Göteborg Law Court extension, Göteborg, Sweden (Asplund 1917-1937). Asplund tended to invent new window frames for each project he did, and that’s what I appear to do in my work. I also recall the unsurpassed bronze and wood doorframes of Asplund’s Crematorium Chapel, at the Skogskyrkogården near Stockholm (Asplund 1934-1940), being a narrative that tells the story of birth and life and death by the mere means of a doorframe! I believe that this aspect of windowframe-making, and making in general, is what fascinates me the most in Peter Zumthor’s work, of which I understand the process of making when I look at it, and of which my understanding comes forth from the intense moments I have seen my grandfather doing it, and I was there in his furniture workshop when he was making tables and chairs, sniffing the smell of woodcurls, coughing when wood dust irritated his throat and swearing when things did not work out the way he wanted it, telling me that wood is like a woman, soft and sweet like it smells, but sometimes hard to work with and hurting like splinters in the palm of your hand that make you bleed like a swine, but also the way it sounds, like a Stradivarius, if you play her properly, as to correspond with the way its wood smells. I was also very impressed by Sverre Fehn’s full scale sections of window frames, drafted with pencil, that I have seen at the 2008 Venice Architecture Biennale, as well as by the drawings made by Jorn Utzon, also drafted in pencil, for his Spanish houses on Mallorca, Can Liz (Utzon 1971) and Can Feliz (Utzon 1994).

Being in that house, enclosed in so many layers of solid brick masses and volumes, within the dense urban fabric of all these buildings, of which almost none seemed to have windows, felt comforting and secure, as if no one or nothing could find us there, safe in our secluded kingdom.

That day, the hatch of the draw well in the garden was laid open. The pump piping needed a repair. Fascinated and frightened, I looked into the well, my eyes scanning the masonry of the tubular volume of brick that disappeared into the subterranean Depth until it became a lightless spot of mat black that marked its perspectival vanishing point, smeared like thumbnailed charcoal on rough paper. Then I looked up and I saw a tall brick factory chimney, sharply presenting itself against the June sky, proudly standing amidst brick factory volumes forming the south wall of the garden, smouldering shreds of black smoke, and all of a sudden, it was certain that a master’s hand had precisely cut the oblong chimney volume out of the brick crust of the Earth in order to put it in reverse on top of the world, leaving a lasered opening for the draw well to look into the brick Substance of the world. Dark shreds of smoke vertically sprouted from the chimney’s mouth to immediately change direction and horizontally hurry their way to the pale blue North.
Reminiscent of the Virgin’s *grotto in Lourdes* (Fabisch 1864), my grandmother got herself installed a grotto for the Holy Mary at the south end of the garden. A replica of the Virgin, her eyes glancing to the skies. White candles. Black flowers with a haze. A small bronze plate engraved with the name of a four year old boy, and the number of a year, 1927. The Virgin standing tall in her niche, my eye level at her feet. I had to look up to her in admiration. I could reach the candles. And the flowers. We put some new ones in the vase. Below, the main entrance to the grotto, as high as me, forever a four year old. Growing up was

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a burden and a disappointment. I stepped into the Darkness of the grotto. Two meters appeared to be two times two hundred. I felt the proximity of the massive brick factory chimney behind the infinite Depth of the grotto. My time expanded under a lowering vault. At first glued behind me like resin, my own shadow had soon caught up with me and suddenly was running ahead of time, pushed me gently in the back by scarce rays of light that reached towards the invisible vanishing point in the Depth. Unmeasurable. Humidity and vapour revealed projection lines constructed by the invisible draftsman. I gazed at a dark wall that was looming in front of me. This must have been the picture plane where my world was projected upon: my silhouette, my time that had come and gone and come, and my future as I wanted it to be, projected on it as an additional layer on the palimpsest of my infant imagination. I have spent a lifetime to find the exact place from where I would be able to decipher the anamorphosis that brought it all together: my remembrance, my shadow and my dream. But still I could not see it. It made no sounds. It was waiting. This wall was rock, and I had to go through it. I wanted it, and I wanted it rough, and it hurt. It smelled like humid moss and molybdenum and fern.

In an instant, I remembered what I had seen right at the entrance of the grotto, in the corner of my eye, a small pond made by my grandfather to please my grandmother, with cement and stones of the grotto itself, wherein I sensed exploding flag that smelled like the birth of green spring, abundantly rooting in the swampy soil, and a griffin straightly standing in the middle, with the gesture of a defrosted cat, his claws firmly gripped around the rim of his dado and a thin water jet spitting from his mule, and a pair of black eyes that warned the intruder of the grotto for the price to be paid in exchange for a dream. But I was unafraid, a hero back then. I have been a knight at my age of four, and I was prepared to fight the dragon. I knew that this long and dark grotto would finally end up in the basement of my grandmother’s house, because I believed in it, like grannie believed in the Virgin Mary, and in the Immaculate Conception.

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8 In the opening scene of the film Die Blechtrommel, by Volker Schlöndorf (Schlöndorff 1979), based on Günther Grass’s novel, a mother is sitting in a potato field, peeling potatoes in the pouring rain, when suddenly Oskar, the protagonist of the novel, pops up from under her skirt where he appears to have been hiding all the time, looking for shelter against the pouring rain, which is a metaphor for the harsch world to which Oskar does not want to belong, as he refuses to grow up physically, in which he succeeds as the book and the film demonstrate.

9 “The word anamorphosis comes from the Greek: ana- (back), indicating a return toward, and morphe- (form), and is defined as a projection of forms outside their visible limits.” (Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier 1995)

10 “We see the Depth, speed, softness and hardness of objects—Cézanne says we even see their odor. If a painter wishes to express the world, his system of color must generate this indivisible complex of impressions, otherwise his painting only hints at possibilities without producing the unity, presence and unsurpassable diversity that governs the experience and which is the definition of reality for us” (Merleau-Ponty 1966).
I had come down to the basement of the house. The stairs, the floor, the massive walls, and the vault, were all carefully masoned in brick. Three vertical tree trunks blocked the openness of the space. The trunks eventually had to support the vault during the bomb raids in the war. In my mind, they had developed new roots in order to stay, and the brick vault was their crown. A small ventilation shaft transported sounds of female footsteps and sniffing dogs from the sidewalk to this brick subterranean world that reminded me of the draw well in the garden underground: the same masonic precision, the same thick layer of brick Substance out of which the same master builder had cut out a void called basement.

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11 Gunnar Asplund, Woodland Funeral Chapter (Asplund 1917-1920): window bay near the organ corner of the chapel.

12 I have discovered now, through this research, where the basic concept of House B (2005-2007) has come from (see Section 2.4.4). The house is situated at the edge of town adjacent to an old forest, and it has three concrete columns. In my lucid moment of creation—and I can remember it very clearly—I imagined three trees that came out of the forest and stepped into the house. And there they were standing in the house, and I imagined them as having the size of three persons, ostentatively carrying the roof. The largest one is supporting the whole roof in the middle of the house like a stem that carries the roof as the crown of the tree, whereas the two other ones, smaller but not equal, behave like caryatids that support the edge of the roof and look into the forest, where they originated from.

I have also seen this poetic image of a central column carrying the roof in Sigurd Lewerentz’s *San Petri Church* in Klippan, Sweden (Lewerentz 1962-1966). Far from wanting to put myself on Lewerentz’s level, I have seen his church only after I had conceived House B.
14 Etude (2010-2012): the labyrinthine brick corridors around the secret wine vault
A secondary brick vault carried the imbricated stairs, and underneath it, a door with vertical wooden planks and an iron latch—the door stood almost always open—gave access to a dark barrel-vaulted underworld where succory and asparagus\(^\text{16}\) were grown in wintertime, in that cavity where light would never travel. In the back of that vaulted cavity, there was a second door, identical to the first one, and it fascinated me. And although one day I had checked the world behind that second door—wooden planks as shelves on which my grandfather kept his best red wine—the almost certain presence of a secret world

\(^{15}\) Light bulbs in my kitchen, beneath the Eye Level in the Perspective.

\(^{16}\) Both succory and asparagus are vegetables that prefer to grow in dark places.
behind these shelves kept compelling me: could this be the presumed connection with the dark end of the grotto in the garden? There was a single light bulb, and a switch, but I was afraid of spiders. So my eyes slowly had to adapt to the twilight seeping in from the ventilation shaft. My position was central, with the trees dancing around me like unknown persons in the dark, and I saw how the perspective loomed slowly and frighteningly in front of me: sparse brownish light fell on the floor and was creeping deeper and deeper into the void and onto the feet of two parallel walls, one on the left and one on the right, that gradually dissolved into pitch black once they raised up to my eye level, from where an unmeasurable black Depth (where the brick vault must have been) crowned the scene. There, my presumption that had emerged in the grotto would be confirmed: I was looking into an infinite black Depth that was the black humid Depth I had sensed in the grotto, presumingly the other side of the vanishing point of the central perspective. I had pierced the dark wall at the end of the grotto, looking for the vanishing point that had enlarged so as to occupy the whole picture plane, and in this amplified state it had taken over the whole central perspective itself, catapulting me at once from a state of grace into the state of emergency for the first time: the vanishing point being the point where all the servant lines of the perspectival drawing come together, where all the lines of the mental construct join to complete the image as the moment of insight and understanding. My infant understanding back then was that, behind the second door in the back of that succory vault in the basement, there must have been a connection with that other enigmatic end, which was the vanishing point in the grotto of the Holy Mary, and that both vanishing points in fact were one

To my astonishment, I would be confronted with those trees again, later, when I first saw the drawings Steven Holl has made for *Metz House* (Holl 1980), and for *Van Zandt House* (Holl 1983).

It felt as if I was surrounded by Giuseppe Terragni’s seven columns in the inferno of his *DATEUM* in Rome (Terragni 1942), a monument to Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*. It is a journey that starts from the ‘dark wood’ and goes through hell, purgatory and paradise. Strange: I see Terragni’s inferno as my architectural paradise, and his paradise as my architectural inferno. Here, I would also like to refer to the Renaissance treatise *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Poliphilo’s Strife of Love in a Dream), allegedly by Francesco Colonna (Colonna 1499). This romance takes a start in a dark forest, from where Poliphilo starts his quest to find his beloved Polia—literally: many things—in a dream. His path crosses many things among which fantastic architectures and dragons, wolves and other weird creatures. He wakes up in a second dream, dreamt within the first dream. In this dream, Nymphs take him to his beloved Polia. Polia kisses Poliphilo back to life, and as he takes her into his arms, she vanishes into thin air. Then, Poliphilo wakes up. Alberto Pérez-Gómez has transported this love story to the late twentieth century, where he has replaced the dark forest by the uncanny of airports and technological environments, wherein fiction, (architectural) theory and pornography merge. In his introduction, Pérez-Gómez describes the original *Hypnerotomachia* as “the telling of a dream, a ‘didactic’ dream, a narrative that articulates the appropriateness and ethical values implicit in the making of ‘classical’ architecture in a way more convincing for us than the canonical treatises of the Renaissance. Its narrative form itself prevents us from reducing its ‘content’ to an instrumental reading and thus opens up ways to articulate ethical questions pertinent to our own architectural practice” (Pérez-Gómez 1994). “At the end of the narrative, however, Poliphilo wakes up from his dream alone yet complete in the presence of an architecture that evokes the memory of fulfillment, the final recognition of the mystery of Depth, the wholeness that, however ‘weak’, grounds us as purposeful beings in the universe” (Pérez-Gómez 1994).

Here, I explicitly want to refer to Jun’ichirō Tanizaki’s *In Praise of Shadows* (Tanizaki 1933), when he describes the black lacquer of tea cups in which the eye of the drinker focuses the bottom of the cup as his vanishing point of that intense moment, and what this reveals when he contends that “This was the genius of our ancestors, that by cutting of the light from this empty space they imparted to the world of shadows that formed there a quality of mystery and Depth superior to that of any wall painting or ornament. The technique seems simple, but was by no means so simply achieved. We can imagine with little difficulty what extraordinary pains were taken with each invisible detail—the placement of the window in the shelving recess, the Depth of the crossbeam, the height of the threshold. But for me the most exquisite touch is the pale white glow of the shoji in the study bay; I need only to pause before it and I forget the passage of time.” I have also encountered this quality of Darkness in Gunnar Asplund’s *Woodland Funeral Chapel* (1917-20), more specifically in the way he has inserted a narrow window bay in the corner in the back of the chapel, where the organ has been installed, through which scarce light streams in and by which he can demonstrate the Thickness of the wall as a confirmation of comfort for those remaining after the deceasing of the beloved one.

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and the same vanishing point, and that it was only me observing it from two different angles, one from the vault of the grotto, one from the vault of the basement, and I was instantly instituting the connection between both, with the concept of vault\textsuperscript{20} as their common denominator. Paradoxically, in the Darkness of the basement I had found my enlightened point of anamorphosis: my remembrance of the grotto, my shadow cast as another layer on the brownish light on the floor, and my dream in which I connected the loose end of this underground wintergarden with the unfinished business of the grotto. My understanding and salvation had suddenly stepped out of the pitch dark I was gazing into.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} It is important to note that—through these doctoral investigations—this congruence between vanishing points under brick vaults has been crucial in my understanding of my architectural roots, and of what it is that fascinates me in the work of other architects. The concept of vault has played a protagonist part in this research process, when I have developed \textit{Etude} (see Section 2.3.5 / 4) as an imaginary design that I had to make to come to this understanding. This doctoral research appears to re-instate this ‘concept of vault’. It may become central in my future work, and it will be an important argument in the way I disseminate the output of this research, for instance, through my way of teaching architectural design. The concept of vault, here, cannot be seen devoid from its brick Substance, from the way it has been made, and from the way it works as a smart system of purely compressive force.

\textsuperscript{21} Much later, in 2002, I was standing face to face with Leonardo da Vinci's painting \textit{Saint John the Baptist} (da Vinci 1513-16) in the Musée du Louvre in Paris. Although it is a rather small painting, it overwhelmed me with recognition. It portrays a young man who steps out of an unmeasurable Darkness, smiling mysteriously and pointing at the Darkness with his index finger. Saint John, in the Bible, is described as “a light that shineth in the Darkness”. My understanding of this painting has also generated my better understanding of Kazimir Malevich’s \textit{Black Crosses} (Malevich 1923), and his \textit{Black Square} (Malevich 1915). These three paintings are about gazing into the dark, and \textit{seeing} something.
In the central room of the house, a red brick chimney dominated the space. The relative absence of daylight, scarcely cast in through a small window on a narrow patio, made the red of the bricks look more loaded and glowing. Two concentric arches\textsuperscript{23} formed an inglenook big enough to lodge a brown erubescent enamelled coal stove with chrome handles, and a four year old. The stove was standing on a red brick dado that came into the room from the back of the inglenook as a brick peninsula of about 75 centimeters. I have always admired the redness of the bricks and the precision of the concentric arches.\textsuperscript{24} The stove could be incited so that the whole room was becoming a boiler, with all of us sitting in it. I could see the rumbling fire through what was left over of the stove door’s mica, blackened by coal and sulfur. My grandmother called this stove The Devil. The TV set had been put in an alcove of a cabinet made by my grandfather. He had very precise hands for wood and metal, like he had ears for music and an eye for photography. This cabinet was the heart of the house yet it was the window to the world. The TV-screen sprouted French movies and American series. Yves Montand. John Wayne. Mannix. They lived in this room. Parisian and Florentine French. Texas slang. An L.A. accent. The doors of this cabinet had been upholstered with thick sheets of brass—about 3 millimeter thick—which were fixed to wooden panels by precisely positioned brass screws with spherical heads and equal rhythmic intervals. The brass gave the cabinet a golden aura, and the parsimonious daylight reflected in it filled the room with magic, casting mysterious blurs of yellow light on the ceiling that was painted in a colour that the French would describe as “vieux rose”.

The cabinet doors formed a brass wall in the room. Known only to the initiated, like us, one of the cabinet doors opened up like a treasury chest, providing a hidden pass-through to the stairwell that led to the first floor. This was our secret corridor into the night.

\textsuperscript{23} The chimney with its arches resembled Louis Sullivan’s \textit{Transportation Building} at the World’s Columbian Expo, Chicago (Sullivan 1893), Frank Lloyd Wright’s \textit{V.C. Morris Gift Shop}, San Francisco (Wright 1948), and the red brick fireplace in Frank Lloyd Wright’s \textit{Arthur E. Heurtley House}, Chicago, US. (Wright 1902). But it may be the inglenook in the study of \textit{Hvitträsk} (like the whole house), near Helsinki, by Harman Gesellius, Armas Lindgren and Eliel Saarinen (Gesellius, Lindgren, Saarinen 1901-1903) that came closest to this memory of mine, when I was there in April 2006.

\textsuperscript{24} This may be the reason why I am so fond of Frank Lloyd Wright’s \textit{Johnson Wax Building}, Racine, Wisconsin, US. (Wright 1936-1939, 1944), and the nearby \textit{Wingspread House}, Wind Point, Wisconsin, US. (Wright 1938-1939). The same goes for James Stirling’s and James Gowan’s \textit{Leicester University Engineering Building}, Leicester, UK. (Stirling and Gowan 1963), in which the redness of brick blends with the redness of tiles in order to become a red haze. My fascination for the work of the Danish master builder Jensen-Klint must undoubtedly also have its origins in this chimney (Jensen 2009).
“Where are you going?”
“To the other side of the morning.”
“Please don’t chase the clouds, pagodas” (Morrison 1978).
The wooden stair was dark and narrow, covered with thick carpet that absorbed the sounds of footsteps. The stair was situated above the stair to the basement. The landing on the first floor was only one square meter of size. On the wall, a photograph with an overview of Lourdes under a Cecil B. DeMille sky. Frightening clouds resembled pagodas.

There were two doors: one on the right that gave access to my grandparents’ room, one on the left which was the room where we slept when we were lodging at grandma’s.

I was standing at a closed door. The forbidden room of my grandparents. There were other rooms forbidden to us: the basement (too dangerous), the photography studio (I had heard about it), the attic (I had not seen it). Forbidden fruit tastes better and more easily deserves a legitimate place in the gallery of personal joy—an important gallery in one’s mental space. These impenetrable spaces have long been solid masses of dark forbidden Substance, a pitch black Thickness with an unmeasurable Depth. Through understanding this dark Substance, my understanding of the Islamic Quaaba in Mecca has grown. The black

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26 *My Grandmother’s House: plan.*
stone is the sacred vanishing point that every human perspective is directed at. It is the distant point every Muslim is looking at, holding his hands before his eyes while praying. It has been this moratorium on spaces that has triggered my fascination. Its incarnation in Substance has constructed the basic layer of what occupies me in my work, what occupies me when I encounter the works of some other architects whose creations seem to lay next to my Darkness, Depth, Thickness, Substance. The substantiation of these mysterious moratorium-spaces has blended with my clandestine journeys into them. They have constituted my fascination for the labyrinthine: the moratorium-space is unmistakably related to (the material presence of) the labyrinthine.

The southern bedroom of the house, where we were sleeping, captured the morning light, first through reflections of the sunrise against the southern hemisphere, then through sunrays gradually falling directly into the room, reflecting their energy on the pale hazlenut surfaces of the walls and the ceiling. This bedroom was situated above the central TV room. At night, laying in our beds, we could hear gunfights in a Sergio Leone movie. In the niche of the chimney, behind a curtain with blue and green flowers, I found wooden shelves, on which old books were stored. The shelves were supported by slats that had precise square sections of about 1,5 x 1,5 centimeters, carefully fixed with screws into the projecting walls of the mantelpiece. I could see, even smell the precisely cut transverse sections of the slats with their parallel wood nerves that would tell the story of the walnut tree they originated from. The oily nurtured walnut shelf planks were meticulously positioned on top of the slats. I thought this piece of systematic furniture would have looked nicer without the anecdotic books in it.

The books smelled sweet and mellow, and the pages felt a bit humid, with a flavor of mildew. The letters on the pages were images, not stories to me. I came from the new world. I would only read cartoons.

I guess there was too much light in the room, like there can be in photography, burning away every Depth from the picture. This may be the reason why it took me some time, maybe a couple of years, before I suddenly noticed a second door in this bedroom. Strange. Second doors were superfluous, and a form of

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27 The plan of Peter Zumthor's Kolumba Museum in Köln, Germany (Zumthor 2007) holds several solid masses of Substance to which the visitor has no access, of which no access can even be found. The visitor unknowingly lingers around them. They only strike the eye of the very attentive observer. These masses of Substance—they are solid blocks of wall standing in the museum—are the dark spots that generate a mysterious and unmeasurable Depth. For a further understanding of this strange phenomenon I suggest to visit the museum, and to investigate its floor plans. Something comparable goes on in Zumthor's Thermal Bath in Vals, Switzerland (Zumthor 1990-96). There also, a number of solid masses stand in the accessible bathing space. Only, and contrary to the Kolumba Museum, in Vals, these solid blocks of Substance are also accessible to the public as they contain smaller baths, belonging to the promenade architecturale of the swimmer.

28 My grandfather one day said to me: “This is walnut.” On another occasion, I saw him oiling the pegs of an old Thonet chair. By association, I knew then that these walnut shelves must have been oiled, but I did not check this.

29 The constructive qualities of these shelves could compete with the corrugated wooden planks in which cigars are made.
abundance that was not allowed, for money was not to be spoiled. At home, each room had one door, and that was clear and simple. Thinking of other houses I had seen, I could not remember rooms in which second doors were needed. But here, the second door was situated in the same wall as the first door, but in the other corner of the room, and it was identical to the first door. This fed my confusion. It had an identical frame, identical panels, all of it

30 I have never wanted my world to be clear and simple. I guess this is the reason why I tend to look for the labyrinthine in architecture. This desire to surpass the reduction to the obvious, to the clear and simple, may be a ground of my resistance, in order to make it more sophisticated, though this may also mean: more difficult to achieve, but much more rewarding to create as the ultimate goal of my designerly ambition. The labyrinthine is also better served by an abundant play of shadows and Darknesses than by too much light. In the Cathedral of Chartres in France, where not only the central labyrinth is worthwhile a visit and a try, but where—most of all—the whole edifice is breathing the labyrinthine, due to the Darkness that dominates the atmosphere, it became clear to me that the Thickness of its Substance is the creator of this Depth of Darkness with which doorways, stairs and griffins seep their ways deeply into the unconscious of the visitor. I have spent days in there, and its Darkness has enlightened me more than the omnipresent light and clarity I had to endure two days later in the nearby detestable Versailles, darkening the visitor’s hope, at least mine.

31 Robin Evans, in Translations from Drawing to Building, and Other Essays (Evans 1997), discusses this matter, more specifically in the section Figures, Doors and Passages, elaborating on the Villa Madama by Raphael and Antonio di Sangallo, in Rome (Raphael and da Sangallo 1518 or 1519). Evans asks us a meaningful question: “First, the rooms have more than one door—some have two doors, many have three, others four—a feature which, since the early years of nineteenth century, has been regarded as a fault in domestic buildings of whatever kind or size. Why?” (Evans 1997) His question not only reminded me of the situation in my grandmother’s house, but also of other situations in my mental space, like my walk through Frank Lloyd Wright’s Cheney House in Chicago (Wright 1904). Where I was standing in front of the fireplace, and I stepped to the left through the dining room. Looking at all the details and the surrounding garden, I wandered through the kitchen into the night quarters of the house—four bedrooms—and all of a sudden I found myself in front of the fireplace again. I could not benefit from an overview of a plan, just pacing through the spaces had surprised me, as it must have surprised the children of the house. Then Evans continues on the Villa Madama: “Where passages and staircases are used, as inevitably they are, they nearly always connect just one space to another and never serve as general distributors of movement.” In Figures, Doors and Passages (Evans 1997), Evans reminds us of Alberti “who was drawing attention to the great variety and number of doors in Roman buildings”: “It is also convenient to place the doors in such a manner that they may lead to as many parts of the edifice as possible.” (Alberti 1485). Applied to this strange bedroom, it is as if the stairs were serving just one room (since the other room—my grandparents’ room—was under a moratorium) and, from there, this one room apparently had to serve the passage to all my other possible rooms or future spaces. Until then, there seemed to be an absence of a general distributor of movement, yet I could sense—through the sudden presence of an additional door in the bedroom, through sounds coming from behind walls, through my presumptions—the dark existence of other rooms. This journey through My Grandmother’s House is an experience comparable with pacing through other houses I had seen, I could not remember rooms in which second doors were needed. But here, the second door was situated in the same wall as the first door, but in the other corner of the room, and it was identical to the first door. This fed my confusion. It had an identical frame, identical panels, all of it
painted in the same glossy vanilla colour which falsely made the evening—when the light had been switched on—look more bright than it really was. They had the same doorhandles, the same keyholes, but different keys. Was this merely a second entrance that I had not noticed yet, to the room, and if so, what would have been the hidden trajectory to get there?

Or was this a new exit to be explored?

It was an afternoon in late July, it was hot and humid and the threat of thunder was audible in the southern distance. I decided to open the second door carefully, trying to make no sound, because my grandmother was having her afternoon nap. I stepped into a narrow and dark new space of about one square meter, right the size and the shape of the landing where I had been just before I entered the southern bedroom, with the same configuration of two indentical doors. Still standing in the doorway, I found a washing stand in white porcelain on my right, around which the wall was clad with pale blue ceramic tiles with white joints. The rumble in the southern skies was growing, with a diminishing intensity of light. Carefully, I took one step, and I could see myself in the mirror.

creation of a delay in perceiving the relations between rooms: these are some aspects of the Nineteenth century English House, particularly of the country dwellings (...) While in France or Germany rooms, like in the Renaissance rational tradition, all have the same shape and are, if ever, characterized by the interior decor, in England rooms for different functions have different sizes and heights, with various degrees of lighting and opening to the outside. In them, one can find subspaces like the bow-window, the fireplace nook or the enclosure of the sitting area, true rooms in the rooms that make space to differences in height and multiple wall claddings inside the same room. It is as if the house itself became an artificial landscape to be discovered, crossed, a region with different orographies, vegetations, densities (Valle 2009). Hermann Muthesius has introduced these qualities of the English Free Style in continental Europe through his book Das Englische Haus (Muthesius 1903), by which he has profoundly influenced the Central European cultural debate in which Adolf Loos’s concept of Raumplan could emerge, next to Le Corbusier’s Plan Libre. The latter contains a risk of two-dimensionality, all too often arranging programmatic elements too randomly on a slab, but on the other hand having the advantage of distributive spatial flexibility. But Loos’s Raumplan, if applied appropriately, has a conceptual capacity to insert the narrative in a designed sequence of spaces by suggesting a chronology in the experience of them—almost like a film director would do—which may result in a classic dramatic structure bringing the user from an introduction and an enhancing suspense to a designed climax.

My preference for the Raumplan may originate from my personal sequence of spatial discoveries in My Grandmother’s House, and my appreciation for the English Landscape Garden, and the subsequent English Free Style Houses.

32 This room, and not the staircase, had thus become the general distributor of movement through the house. I drew from this that this is acceptable in architectural design, contrary to general cultural standpoints since the early 19th Century. “In other words these thoroughfares were able to draw distant rooms closer, but only by disengaging those near at hand. And there is another glaring paradox: in facilitating communication, the corridor reduced contact. (Evans 1997). William Morris, describing an old house in Kelmscott, describes “The first door (…) has the peculiarity of being without passages, so that you have to go from one room into another to the confusion of some of our casual visitors, to whom a bed in the close neighbourhood of a sitting room is a dire inpropriety. Braving this terror we must pass through …” (Morris 1895).

33 I checked it.

34 This setting may seem mundane, like coming from a cheap horror movie, but it is important to note that this has happened as it is described here: I was about five, it was in July and humid and hot, and the sky was slowly darkening with a threatening rumble of thunder in the air. I heard my mother say: “Look at those towering clouds. This will be a terrible thunderstorm.” These clouds resembled the ones I had seen in Cecil B. DeMille’s The Ten Commandments (DeMille 1956), which were the ones I had seen on the picture of Lourdes, at the first landing of the stairs. The atmosphere was Wagnerian.
above the washing stand. With the light coming from behind me, I could hardly see the details of my face, that looked more like a silhouette of a living puppet I knew from somewhere. I was sweating. That place smelled musty and dense, and in the mirror I saw a dark velvet curtain behind me, forming the fourth side.  

I am still scared when I am writing this. I was scared when I first saw Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Marnie* (Hitchcock 1964) twenty years later. Especially the scene when Marnie’s mother enters her daughter’s room, coming from the landing of the stairs, with the light coming from behind her, was real to me. The camera travels in the interior spaces of David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch 2001), and the way the camera explores the subsequent spaces provokingly slow, going around corners of walls and velvet curtains also remind me very strongly of this personal experience.
of this oppressive space. I was afraid of thunder that might jump me in the face if I would open that curtain. So I didn’t. I decided I’d rather open the second door in front of me, in order to flee my way north, deeper into the Depth of the house for I understood that thunder was coming in from the south. I stepped into a room I had never been in before, of which I did not know the existence. It was almost dark as if light had never been in there, except from one light bulb under which I saw my grandmother, whom I almost did not recognise, sitting upright in her bed. So this must have been the forbidden room, my grandparents’ bedroom, apparently accessible through more than one door, by more than one trajectory through the house! I used to always see her with her white hair tied together in a knot at the back of her head, but here I saw her ghostly, her white hair hanging loose, down to her shoulders, with the light bulb more behind her than above her, making her hair even whiter in the dark. She warned me that I should not come in there, and that I was a bad boy, and that thunder would come and get me soon! It was around four. She was reading a book. “Wolfgang Amadeus was not a lightsome man, was he?” she suddenly said. I looked around in the Darkness of the room and saw curtains of heavy, almost black velvet that deeply obscured the space from where normally light should have come. Then, two mahogany wardrobes loomed very high, closer to me than expected, and they reached up to the ceiling. Their doors had little windows above, behind which moss-green curtains were hanging like silk skirts that hide a secret. The keyhole plates were adorned with bas-reliefs representing candle holders and vases filled with grapes that abundantly hung over their lips. The motif of grapes continued in the brightly sculptured wooden cornices on top of the wardrobes. There, they mutated into angels’ heads and feathered wings, and incited by the unchained electrical storm they came into a state of levitation. I was becoming physically unwell, my eye-balls showing their white and whirling down again to meet the frames of the Jugendstil doors, only projecting a few millimeters and forming a play of oblique lines with the panels that filled them, suggesting defective flattened perspectives of ancient Egypt. On the floor, a small carpet looked like long black grass in which the mahogany bed was standing. The bed had a high end against the wall, where it was equipped with two lamps shaped like pinkish glass roses. In one of them, a small light bulb produced an almost metaphysical light. My grandmother looked very old, and everything in this room announced the coming of the Man in Black. The air of a sarcophagus had filled the room. I did not want to breathe it, but still it seeped into my every pore. I could choose between the smell or suffocation. I was too young for this. How could the night come so near to a summer’s afternoon, just one step in and one step out, merely one door away. But wanting to go out, I felt that something very powerful was holding me back, and that this was the price the griffin next to the grotto in the garden had warned me for: “Once you will have penetrated this unknown Darkness and broken the moratorium, you will be contaminated forever, doomed to slip into other unknown Darknesses, carrying torches in order to unveil them, one by one. You will have to repeat your ritual time and again, to instate the Thickness of Substance in order to first insert the unknown dark solids into your world, so that you can explore them, as a powerful antidote to the boredom of your already known voids of light. With most of your colleague architects endlessly repeating their hollow mantra’s of abundant light and La Ville Radieuse (Le Corbusier 1924) and so, you will forever feel astranged. A devoted exile in your celebrated Darkness.”

By now, I had not only looked at my vanishing point from one side (the grotto), and then from the other side (the basement). I had finally stepped into it.
New Stairs (2010).
It was as if the fluff had been shaved randomly, making empty fluffless spots on the black velvet curtain I was standing face to face with. The washing stand was behind me. No electrical storm, but clear skies and a late October breeze, pushing clouds like white flakes into the south. I could hear the screams of floating seagulls taking advantage of the cool currents of air coming in from the distant North Sea. So I pulled open the curtain. A seemingly endless steep stair vanished into a distorted perspective obscured by a hollow dark in which my surprised eyes began to gaze. Now I was puzzled: not only two doors, but two stairs as well. I had to climb them to find out, and I reached another landing. Again, two identical doors, identical to the identical doors in the oppressive room with the washing stand that were identical to the doors I had seen on the first landing. I was beginning to see a pattern as opposed to the lack of pattern in the fabric of the black velvet of the curtain. Coming from the stairs, doors appeared to give access to a bedroom—the real distributor of movement!—with more than one door that gave access to identical doors that unraveled my Darkness and unveiled the existence of other stairs to other floors with more identical doors. Standing on that upper landing, I decided not to open the door on my right, for this might be the forbidden room again at the north side of the house where the thunderstorm might have fled into, and I was still afraid that it might be in there, patiently waiting for me to come back and to swiftly flare up again, and I was afraid for my grandmother with her spectral white hair, with her old book, with her strange questions about Wolfgang Amadeus’s Requiem. “Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis” (Mozart 1791). On my left, I soundlessly pressed down the buttery doohandle. The wooden smell of the attic smashed into my nostrils. I saw a wooden workbench, a set of hammers, from big to small, with carefully shaped wooden grips. I took one and it was pleasant to hold. My hand fitted around the grip, and my whole self was becoming a hammergrip’s glove, and I would forever understand how easy the intention of the designer and the action of the maker could morph into each other, if I was prepared to pay attention to it. I saw screwdrivers, woodfiles. A manifold of plane irons. On the wall, screws were driven into a plywood panel. Wooden triangles, plummets, measurers, pinceaus, a water level. Wooden shelves full of glass goblets filled with carefully assorted nails and screws, bolts and nuts, rondels. A manual drilling machine, and next to it its two

37 Alain Resnais’ experimental film L’année Dernière à Marienbad (Resnais 1961) is a cinematographic adaptation of the Nouvelle Roman, in which the boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred and the framing of time and space is being put under investigation. The film presents a luxurious Baroque hotel, where a man tries to convince a woman of how (he dreamt how) they had an affair in the same hotel, one year before, something she cannot remember. Another man plays (card) games with all the guests in the hotel, and he wins time after time, as he masters ‘the rules of the game’, whereas the first man, who tries to turn his fiction (or his memory, or his imagination?) into reality, is being shunned by the woman, who, at the end of the film, leaves the hotel with her husband who appears to be the (card) player himself. Finally, the name of the game appears to be logic and rule, with the discouraging conclusion that the realm of the dream or the free excursions in the human being’s own mind is presented as completely in vain, granted no chance to win in this world of logic and rule, the name of the game (of cards). The gardens, together with the sumptuous spaces and rooms of the Baroque hotel, play a protagonist role, wherein the human characters are their servants. The gardens and spaces of the château refer to the ‘clarté’ of Versailles, in which Cartesian compositions and planned geometry overrule the wandering spirit of the mere dreamer who does not play cards. The film is a fatalistic demonstration of the concept and the rigidly planned mechanisms of a ‘mariage de raison’ (based on fact), and how this concept overrules the dream of true love with its own unplanable paths (fiction). I was looking at the film, and listening to the declamation of a female off-screen voice that said: “… un escalier, une marche, une marche, un esaclier, un corridor, une porte, un autre corridor, une porte, un mirroir, une porte, un corridor, …”, a stairwell, a step, a step, a stairwell, a corridor, a door, another corridor, a door, a mirror, a corridor, …”, while the camera travels through the endlessness of what is described by the off-screen voice. In one of the conversations the card player talks to his wife “… un jardin à l’ordonnance rassurante, aux arbustes taillés, aux allées régulières, ou nous marchons a pas comptés, côté à côté, jour après jour …”, when she interrupts him and says: “Taisez-vous! Taisez-vous!”, translated “ … a garden with a reassuring order, with rigidly shaped bushes, with straight paths, on which we walked with counted steps, side by side, day after day (…) shut up! shut up!”

38 “Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine on them.”
electric sisters, one abraded, one new. Through a small dormer window, I could see the sun had disappeared behind packing clouds. I could hear how it softly began to rain on the roof tiles. I tossed with smelly woodcurls that covered the floor—a sheet of simili parquet, worn out with big holes through which I could decipher the parallel wooden planks underneath it. I began trying to unroll the woodcurls. I failed, sniffing them. I began to collect and assort wood chips on the working bench. By now, rain was heavily falling on the roof, rustling and spreading a smell of wet air. I turned around to see the door I had come through, in the left corner of the room. Then I looked into the right corner where I expected the second door, to correspond with the bedroom as the distributor of movement one floor below, another washing stand maybe, relying on the pattern of stairs and landings and doors that had begun to emerge in my mind. That corner of the room was dark and remote from the dormer window where I stood, so I had to step forward to have a closer look. There was no second door. Did the pattern begin to fail?

This was my grandfather’s furniture workshop (my family called it the WorkHouse) where he made chairs and tables. He was very good at it, and he allowed me to help. I have been there for afternoons to see how he skillfully carved and assembled dovetails, dowels, tongue and groove joineries, box joints, refined finger joints, precise mortise and tenon joints. My preference for wood as a construction Substance has its origins in this attic workshop (for larger pieces, he would use the greenhouse next to the small garden downstairs, in order to be able to take the finished pieces out and bring them to the client). This attic was crowded with fragments of chairs and tables hanging on the spans and purlines of the roof timber, which were purely constructed beauty in their own right, and refined full scale drawings that represented them. I have studied them for hours. My beloved concept of section stems from the precision with which I saw, heard and smelled how the belt saw cutted table pegs and sections of window frames, and from the accuracy with which my grandfather’s hands, of which one finger was missing, mounted lock plates for which he drilled vertical holes through the wood to make the cylinder locks fit perfectly, leaving curls and dust that then was decisively blown away by the furniture maker who could also blow a trumpet, sometimes rhythmically blowing away dust while he was whistling a tune he had to rehearse for his brass band. It was here also that I have learned the sound of swearing, when the last strike of the plane iron appeared to be the one that was too much, directly blaming the metaphysical level of God for an earthly shortcoming of the mere Substance of wood. It belonged to my learning of life: to balance between the thinking mind of the architect and the working hand of the craftsman, wanting to incorporate both in the same body, mine, merging into the thinking hand (Pallasmaa 2009) of the creator that comes to life in the full process of creation, like I had bodily presumed when I was holding grips of hammers. “Perhaps thinking, too, is just something like building a cabinet. At any rate, it is a craft, a ‘handicraft’, and therefore has a special relationship to the hand. In the common view, the hand is part of our bodily organism. But the hand’s essence can never be determined, or explained, by its begin an organ which can grasp. (…) The hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs (…) different by an abyss of essence. (…) But the craft of the hand is richer than we commonly imagine (…) The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others (…) But the hand’s gestures run everywhere through language, in their most perfect purity precisely when man speaks by being silent. (…) Every motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hand bears itself in that element. All the work of the hand is rooted in thinking” (Heidegger 1977). Juhani Pallasmaa further elaborates on this theme in The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture (Pallasmaa 2009), emphasising on the crucial position tacit wisdom and embodiment occupy in the creation process of architecture, and acknowledging the process of making as the central body of architectural creation, with all the intellectual considerations constructed around it, and not the other way round.
To my right, I saw an open zinc gutter that ran through the attic and that transported rainwater coming from the gutter at the street side of the house, where vertical rainpipes were forbidden in order not to obstruct the pedestrians on the narrow sidewalk, with the gutter at the garden side of the house, from where a rain pipe went down whimsically, collecting water from other pipes coming from other roofs in a fuzzy logic that only smart people could understand. In the running water, I saw an oak leaf sliding by, which later inspired me to fold paper boats and use the gutter as a river, me and my cousins, to my grandfather’s dismay who found the vertical rain pipe obstructed with paper boats. The zinc of the gutter was carefully folded in a U-section, of which both top ends were folded outwards, ending with a bead. I could see the stains of solder at the seams where the zinc had been welded. This U-section was laid into a wooden U-shaped section that was standing on knee high supports that came up from the attic floor. On a shelf, I could see a full scale probe of this wood and zinc section of about forty centimeters long. I took it and turned it around in every position so that I could examine it.

Community Center (1993-1996): lighting concept whimsically crisscrossing the space.

I would remember this soldered zinc when I designed the sliding entrance doors for House DG-DR (1999-2004)(see Section 2.3.4 / 5). These large doors have been clad with zinc sheets, that are soldered together, forming one big surface that expands in the summer heat as to form a wavy and rough and irregular surface that many people do not like because they only like polished and strained and tight surfaces like the ones they see in glossy architecture magazines, digitally manipulated. In these doors I deliberately left the solder seams unpolished and visible in order to show the process of making and the hand of the maker, despite the fact that this was an urban context where people could come very close to these doors as they were situated on the urban sidewalk. Making a slot for the letterbox, and two slots as doorgrips has permitted me to more densely demonstrate the solder seams, even to touch them in the act of opening and closing the doors. I had observed my grandfather soldering zinc and other metals, working slowly with the soldering iron and putting it intermittently on a wooden block on his working bench and softly blowing on the freshly soldered seam. The glowing iron effused a dampy smell of melting metal, which I saw dripping on the zinc sheet before it was skillfully rendered, smear after smear, by the thinking hand of the craftsman. These observations, enhanced by the smell and the calm gestures, without which this action is doomed to fail, have seeped deeply into my soul, where I have rediscovered them through this research as bring them back onto the explicit stage of architectural practice.

Probes like these have been absent too long in my practice. Lately, and informed by the results of this research, I have reinstated them as a method in the design process, bringing construction practice back into the design studio where it belongs. For the recent project of The Boathouse 2 (2008-2012)(see Section 2.4.3) in Eemnes, The Netherlands, two full scale mock-ups have been made. The first mock-up has allowed us to investigate the
wooden version of the design. Thanks to the mock-up, which revealed too much tinkering and messy joints, we abandoned this version in favor of the epdm-version. We would not have abandoned the wooden version if we had not made the mock-up. Then, another mock-up of the epdm version of the design, has been built around a steel structure in order to investigate all the joints between the steel sections and to test the joinery of the skin of the building. Bringing construction practice right in the centre of the design process has proven to be very effective, both on the design process and on the on-site activities afterwards. I have also seen this method in other inspiring practices, like Studio Mumbai in India,
CL2-Apparments (1997-2002): an appartment in the garret: “I soundlessly pressed down the butty doorhandle. The wooden smell of the attic smashed into my nostrils. I saw a wooden workbench, a set of hammers, from big to small, with carefully shaped wooden grips. I took one and it was pleasant to hold. My hand fitted around the grip, and my whole self was becoming a hammergrip’s glove, and I would forever understand how easy the intention of the designer and the action of the maker could morph into each other, if I was prepared to pay attention to it. I saw screwdrivers, and woodfiles. A manifold of plane irons. On the wall, screws were driven into a plywood panel. Wooden triangles, plummets, measurers, pincers, a water level. Wooden shelves full of glass goblets filled with carefully assorted nails and screws, bolts and nuts, rondels. A manual drilling machine, and next to it its two electric sisters, one abraded, one new. Through a small dormer window, I could see the sun had disappeared behind packing clouds. I could hear how it softly began to rain on the roof tiles. I tossed with smelly woodcurls that covered the floor.”
I had found no door in that dark corner. Then I looked up and discovered another floor in the house—a garret under the crest—where a saw a television antenna—a magic connection with 'out there'. Only, I could not find out how I could get to this garret. No door, no stairs, no ladders. Then, the pattern in my head activated again. I began to make abstractions, to adapt the method of reasoning. Finding no second door in the furniture workshop did not mean that there could not be a door coming from the other side of the wall. Perhaps, I could creep to this spot from the other side, like I had done with the vanishing point in the grotto, when I surrounded the problem from the secondary vault in the basement. So should I go back to the landing of the stair I had come up by, and look behind the northern door. Unafraid, because I was certain that thunder had gone, I stepped into the Northern bedroom. I was struck by an insistant 1943-atmosphere. The wallpaper was pale-brownish, on which little linear motifs seemed to move in the half light, like spermatozoids under a microscope. It looked as if somebody was still busy drawing these moving little lines with a sharp black pen, lines that could have been stalks of flowers, but the petals were obscured, faded out, almost missing, only leaving a petaline remembrance. The milk chocolate ceiling was flat and low, made of plywood panels, painted in a greasy pale brown. The junctures between the panels were covered with tiny slats that had a semi-circular section, equally painted in pale brown. I could see the little nails by which they had been fixed. Visible, but painted over. There were two large beds, and a dormer window. The first bed was standing with its head end against the neighbour’s wall, like normal people put beds in rooms. The second bed, however, was placed under the dark inclination of the roof, against the opposite neighbours’ wall, belonging to the house of Antonio di Silvestro, who originated from Sicily, “allegedly a member of the maffia”, my cousin boasted. When we were a bit older, around seven, we used to sleep in that room, me and my younger brother and my cousins (up to three cousins in one bed!), and I was one of the cousins who had to sleep in that second bed, next to the maffia neighbour, in the dark corner of the room, under the oppressive inclination of the roof that would just wait to crush me as soon as I had fallen asleep. A fluorescent light tube lit the room from the first bed’s side. When we had extinguished the light, the fluorescence remained visible, a sinister glow in the dark, and we were afraid of it. Then we incited each others fear. I said to my cousins that I had seen thunder flee in here, that awkward summer afternoon “of which I did not want to give further details”, and that it was true, since grandma had said “that thunder would come and get me soon”, and that she even looked spooky, and I described her spectral white hair, and I ascribed it to that white light tube looking at us from near above, which was nothing less than thunder itself, the direct and threatening presence of evil in our immediate proximity.

I walked into that low remembrance space, that Northern bedroom in the attic, looking for the assumed second door that I had missed in the remote corner of the furniture workshop in the Southern attic, and that would give access to another stair to bring me to the garret where the television antenna stood. I had to pass by a wardrobe that was as high as the low ceiling. It looked like a medieval triptych. In the mirror that occupied the middle front of it, I could see myself sneaking by. I slowly turned around the left corner of the wardrobe. Yes, there was a door! And it was identical to all the other doors that had lured me into this labynrith of doors and stairs with sounds of rooms and Substance with odors and doors. It had a doorhandle, and a keyhole, and a key. Now I would finally find my stairs to the supreme summit of the house, where I would stand face to face with the television antenna, where I would be able to see the whole universe, circling above my labynrith like Daedalos and Icaros, tracing the Minotaur and finishing him off, finally understanding the complexity of my world in exchange for the price the griffin in the garden had warned me for, warned me for *The Man Who Sold The World* (Bowie 1970). But then I would be the one who had discovered it! The Hero! Glory! My cousins would have to bite the dust!

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45 Because of the garret with the television antenna above.
We passed upon the stair, we spoke in was and when
Although I wasn't there, he said I was his friend
Which came as some surprise, I spoke into his eyes
I thought you died alone, a long long time ago

Oh no, not me
I never lost control
You’re face to face
With the Man Who Sold The World

I opened the door decisively, preparing to take my first step on the stair towards the universe. But apparently I had discovered a built-in cabinet, with banquets and sheets and starched pillowslips that smelled like spring stacked on wooden shelves. This could not be true. If there wasn’t a door that could give access to the garret from the furniture workshop, and if the door in this room did not do so, how could anyone possibly reach the television antenna, and what else did the garret serve for if it could not be accessed? What was the secret? I knocked in the back of the cabinet where vertical wooden planks were painted in pale pistache green. But the wood did not feel hard. Knocking on it sounded warm and greeting, inviting to interlocution⁴⁶, so I knocked again. I touched the planks that seemed to be moving a little when I pushed them gently. And I did it again, and again, and by doing so, my insight emerged: this is it! What if there were a hollow in the wall? What if the wall between the furniture workshop on the other side and this built-in cabinet was thicker than I had originally thought? So that the missing stairs could be within the Thickness of this wall! It was only me who could not find the hidden access to it, and nobody was telling me, because that was the secret of the labyrinth of the house! I was satisfied with the solution I had found, accepting that secrets were there to remain secrets, unexplained, preserving the magic. So I never reached that garret, and I made myself do with the magnificent outlook from the dormer window. There I could see the whole: that brick small town as a dense and labyrinthine urban fabric in which this labyrinthine house was crafted and cradled. The roofs, fragments of streets and traffic, the train station in the steel distance, the carillon belltower of the main church that sounded a manifold of hours that had passed, the laundry shop across the street, female footsteps on the sidewalk that became reverberating Substance between brick walls, snippets of people chatting, cars

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⁴⁶ In Heidegger and the Poets: Poiesis/Sophia/Techné, Chapter 5: Mnemosyne’s Death and the Failure of Mourning (Fóti 1992), Véronique M. Fóti analyses Martin Heidegger’s understanding of Hölderlin’s poem Mnemosyne. Mnemosyne, in Greek antiquity, is the personification of remembrance. Heidegger, then, in his concept of Andenken (memory, not as something the subject goes to, but as a remembrance that comes to the subject, that comes over him) understands remembrance as quintessential to a new historical instauration. According to Heidegger, the inner dynamics of history is poetic and philosophical, in which the poet institutes (stiftet) history, and the thinker (philosopher) founds (gründet) it. Language, then, is “the power to bring to word”, which is the poet’s capacity to institute history in the pure, unspoiled, uncontaminated poetic language that can directly connect man with historical remembrance through its first-hand power to bring to word. However, language has become instrumentalised as the servant of unconcealment, and technicised in the thinker’s operations of founding history. According to Heidegger, the gentle law of the poet (Ge-setz) “becomes occluded by the totalizing posure (Ge-stell) of technicity, which is not, for Heidegger, a mere infatuation with technological power but rather the very nature of evil. (…) The destiny of unconcealment is, in and of itself, not some danger or other, but the danger. If destiny prevails, however, in the manner of the posure (Ge-stell), it is the utmost danger.” (Fóti 1992). Then, all presencing becomes reduced to mere disposability or resource (Bestand). But, still according to Heidegger, this Being itself as mischief (Unfug) gives birth to ambiguity “since danger itself gives rise to and sustains ‘that which saves’, Heidegger experiences no attrition of hope. The specter of despair is transformed into a consciousness of destinal or ‘spiritual’ mission, which calls upon the thinker to heed the word of the poet who speaks to a destitute time’. (…) In the intellectual landscape thus mapped out, Hölderlin’s last hymn, Mnemosyne, closely linked to Andenken, through the thematic of commemoration, marks the consummate intensification rather than the dismantling of these structures. As Anselm Haverkamp remarks (…), Hölderlin’s interpretation, especially under Heidegger’s imprintur, has seen the close relation of Andenken and Mnemosyne more in terms of celebration than of mourning and has consequently identified in Mnemosyne not the anticlimax (regression) of Andenken but its climax (intensification)” (Fóti 1992). The denouement of my journey through My Grandmother’s House is to be understood as coming from the poet who institutes (a) history through language as the power to bring to word. It calls for an understanding as such, before the thinker finds it, which may mean, before the power to bring to word becomes instrumentalised and technicised. The way to the denouement also applies the concept of greeting, in the way Heidegger presents it, together with his concept of interlocution (Gespräch) and the dream, in that every new element in the journey has been welcomed as a possible carrier of essential information, which has been the way it has been welcomed in the period of childhood when all these experiences have paraded in front of me. In that respect, Andenken as coming over us instead of us going to it applies for this journey. For further reading, I refer to Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe 52,67,115 (Heidegger 2009). In order not to forget it: these contentions call upon the thinker to heed the word of the poet who speaks to a destitute time!
passing by. I was contented with my discoveries, contented with the dream with which I could finally solve the last stair, the one I would forever miss, and for that reason, all the ones that I would ever design. I presumed it in the Thickness of the wall, I dreamt it.\textsuperscript{47} Over and over again, as I appear to do, to have done, when I look back. I have made a career out of it, out of the greeting planks in the back of the built-in cabinet, and out of the welcoming sound they made, out of the touch rebounding through my careful hand. When I knocked on them, they’ve let me in. And now I dwell in their woody Substance forever.

I was standing in the dormer window in grandpa’s furniture workshop. My withdrawal in there was inspired by my longing for some southern light after I had found the missing stairs in the Thickness of the wall during my temporary residence in the northern bedroom with the built-in cabinet. I was hoping for some clear sky after the heavy rain of the hours that had passed. I could see the far distance, the lowland stretching southwards, where it swept into a fringe of hills that formed my horizon that also is the southern seam of the northwest European plain. This was my first Emergence of Thickness. From my metropolitan there, My Grandmother’s House in a small town in the plain, I was looking at my local here, where home was in the hills. In this moment of clarity, here and there had switched places, and my understanding of the essence of here and there, and of their co-presence as the anatomic section of my landscape, emerged. But understanding it by gazing from my there gave birth to my homesickness, my restless longing for my here that would always be there, puzzled in the labyrinth, and hidden behind coarse walls with layered skins and closed doors.\textsuperscript{48}

As a boy, I was fond of browsing through my atlas, gazing at geographical maps of Europe. I have been drawing them, time and again. Then, the combination of gazing through the dormer window and browsing through my atlas made me understand my world, my personal geography, the vertical section of my landscape.

\textsuperscript{47} It is important to note that not finding these final stairs there has opened up (my) perspectives, showing (me) that more than one solution can be imagined, instead of having to accept the one solution if a stair would actually have been there, which might have closed down (my) perspectives and have blocked (my) imagination of all the other possible stairs forever. To give an appropriate answer to that vocation of the labyrinth, and to create these different solutions, which is: to make them in Substance, may have brought me to the decision to become an architect.

\textsuperscript{48} Professor Li Shiqiao has pointed at a strong element of homesickness in my presentation of My Grandmother’s House, at the Graduate Research Conference in Melbourne, in June 2011. I have taken this remarkable comment with me, flying back to Europe, 32 hours on airplanes, and pondered with it the following months. Later, through The Excavation (see Section 2.3.3 / 3), I could give this homesickness a place by its situation in a larger whole, through my understanding of the common denominator of My Grandmother’s House and The Excavation, which is the longitudinal section through my (geographical) landscape that carries it all.

Homesickness needs a home and an away in order to be establishable. An away makes a home more understandable, as an (architectural) concept, for the (re)searching architect.
Strategic plan of the architectural practice under scrutiny. The section through the Northwest-European landscape, the fundamental layer of my mental space that grounds the architectural practice under scrutiny, is exportable, as a concept, possibly informing other architectural practices in comparable landscapes-as-sections, or inspiring to look at other landscapes-as-sections as the basic layer for architects with their personal mental spaces to be explored.
Plan of my grandfather's photography studio, situated in a little wooden house on top of the kitchen (see photographs of the scale model) (see Section 2.3.3 / 2-1), only accessible by a ladder, which made it forbidden territory for me as a child. By definition, this was the darkest place of them all, with a floorplan as simple as it was labyrinthine. Interchangeable doors, interchangeable spaces, interchangeable Darkness, an impermeable Thickness of Substance that generated an unmeasurable Depth of Darkness. One orange light bulb (Edison 1879). I invite the reader to keep gazing into the confusing plan.
The Black Mariah, Thomas Edison’s film and photography studio (Edison 1893). This edifice would inspire me to make The Boathouse 2 (see Section 2.4.3).
2.3.3 / 2-4

(\textit{the Concept of the Hidden Room}).
?
And now I dream that dream again, like so many times before, and before ... I see myself standing in front of the house so familiar to me inside that dream, although I do not know it at all outside of it. When I go there the people I know are always gone, always dwelling some other place. A large window frame expresses openness, and next to it—at its right side—somebody had thought about a wine-red door as an entrance to number 15. I open the door and look into an endless corridor, narrow but high, its walls covered with shiny white tiles, made and fixed with ceramic precision. In the rear a far away window casts reflecting white light onto adjacent surfaces of walls, a weightless ceiling, and a dark floor. Above the window I decipher a painting of a blue-green feathered peacock standing in a green-blue landscape with a country house with a thatched roof, a fresh community of young trees and a small brook. On my left side I look at four closed doors in a row. Their rhythmic order suggests the hidden existence of rooms with comparable sizes. Through a small window above the entrance door the sun is shining southeasterly on the back of my neck, its warm rays revealing the exact elevenish time of the morning. A choir of healthy mathematicians sings a song composed by a sad young poet52, about Tom Waits who sings “A Little Rain”. I decide to walk and check the first door. The room—empty as usual—corresponds with the previous versions of the dream: the welcoming gesture of abundant light demonstrates the glory of June, lured inside through the vast window pane. I had already noticed this gesture in reverse, standing in the middle of the silent street, looking intensely at that window from outside as I was lured into the house myself. Then, I briefly investigate the second room, to check its well known Darkness: it has no window—it is situated in the heart of the house. I do not take a look into the third room, expecting to find the same Darkness, relying on my experience as an architect, knowing that a space in the heart of the massive Darkness of the house cannot receive the morning sunlight. With a steady step I head directly to the fourth room at the rear bay of the house. At the end of the corridor I approach the window. I face the blue-green peacock from nearby, and now I find all the details of the painted landscape that fills the empty plastered surface between the window and the ceiling with promise. The painting is a fresco and the brook on it is vivid. I check the fourth room to see if the light is still streaming in through a large white painted window frame that faces the south of the country, and I can now see the dark flow of a vast river, and turning my head slightly to the right I can see its continuous flow through the smaller window at the end of the corridor. The river is broad and lies directly at the feet of the house, and stretching out with my eyes I now begin to look for the opposite river bank. But I can find none. In a moment of doubt, I think I am looking at the sea. But strong appears to be the current of the water, that soundlessly passes from left to right, so this has to be a river not the sea. In a brief and deep moment of musing and brooding, I am gazing into the black and soundless flow of Darkness that is also the Darkness of my soul and that is transporting all my thoughts away towards a western estuary by the sea, and in brief moment I understand that all the rivers of the world have their estuaries in the West. And now I remember my moment of clarity, when I wrote on the inside of an old book: “Life is a short and narrow passage between an endless sea and an endless sea.” The deep and frightening blackness of the river contrasts strongly with the vivid whiteness of the window frame and the white painted walls and the ceiling of the room I had found vast in its familiar emptiness behind the fourth door, and with the pale blue of the southern hemisphere at an almost noon-June.

Then, returning from this noontime gaze, and in a mood of almost fulfilled expectation, I step back into the corridor, heading back north, hoping to find my way out into the silent street again. At the third door, closed and first neglected by my automatic reasoning as an architect, my stepping movement stops in a moment of remorse. My fingertips push the door open, and I stare into the wellknown Darkness. Only scarcely some daylight from the corridor slips into the room and spreads on the white walls in slow motion, where it equalizes into a grey that only wants to share its common denominator with black. I’ve known this room for years in my recurrent dream. My eyes slowly begin to adapt to the light conditions, and I drift away in thoughts, asking myself what the intention of the master builder must have been in the moment he invented the house with the room with no windows.

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In a remote left corner of the room, I now begin to see a door that never before had captured my attention, and although this is a recurrent dream, this moment of seeing always is a paradoxical blend of recognition and surprise. Although I have known this house in dreams of years, time after time I dream that I have never seen this door before. Hesitatingly, I start to walk, and my fingertips slowly stretch to push the door with care and prudence: here, I discover this strange and unknown space, the hidden room, and I could never have presumed its existence before by simply understanding a ground floor plan, by logic or reasoning, for this felt instinctively, intuitively as the room of the soul that I had always been looking for: its floor with broad wooden planks, painted in glossy white, mutating on its contours into old but carefully molded fifty centimeter high plinths similarly painted in glossy greasy white that transcends into shiny white walls that reflect the light in an oily way as they raise four meters high. When I look up, a heavily moulded plaster ceiling with expressively sculptured motifs of vineyard leaves intertwines with glorious laurel crowns in a carefully studied matter-in-motion that unites the surfaces of wall and ceiling into a unique spatial gesture. And here I finally begin to understand the Rococo palaces, and mirror rooms, and L’ Année Dernière à Marienbad\footnote{L’Année Dernière à Marienbad, Alain Resnais, France (Resnais 1961). See previous footnote about it.}, and I physically feel the lifting of the sombre annunciations I heard before: of organ music that weighed like a sarcophagus of tons of led upon the darkened flanks of my blistered soul. And I feel healed, as my Age of Enlightenment dawns: I find no windows in the walls, I find no skylights in the ceiling, I can only see a chimney and a royal mantelepiece in white Carrara marble, heavily adorned with vegetal motifs out of scale, I see one hundred electric light bulbs in white porcelain sockets at eye level and below, they do not shine with electrics out of order, but still this room is filled with light. This light cannot be physical, logical, because of the absence of windows: this is the continuous and blinding metaphysical glare of awareness and understanding, as if the Holy Spirit Himself had descended within the Thickness of the wall between the rooms I had known, that special room between rooms two and three, with no obvious door in the dominating corridor: the hidden room, only to be discovered in a dream, not by reasoning or logic.\footnote{To find, or rather, to presume a ‘secret’ room within the Thickness of the walls that surround the rooms one can visit and see, is also experienceable when one attentively wanders through the spaces and walls (masses) of Peter Zumthor’s Kolumba Museum (Zumthor 2007), Köln, Germany. When one checks the subjective spatial experience with the objective information on the floor plans, indeed a series of ‘unidentified’ spaces or rooms becomes obvious. What is in there? A comparable experience occurs in the Thermal Bath, Zumthor’s masterpiece in Vals, Switzerland (Zumthor 1990-1996), although there each mysterious grotto appears to be accessible.} This is the room I want to design.
**2.3.5 / 3-2 The Meaning of Life**

**Added Value as the Meaning of Life?**
**an Assumption, a Short Story.**

**Abstract.**

Added Value as the Meaning of Life?
There is an architect who seeks added value through making architecture. He proclaims the Landscape as an essential common good in connection with his longing for an embodied sense of protection and his [self]-imposed quest for a more humane existence of woman and man.
His finding of the place in the Landscape is essential and connects with his ability to detect value both ‘out there’ and within the self, as the indispensable substitute for the womb.
In that place, making architecture is ‘to poein’, to dream the Embryo [the Poetic Image] of the design as cradled by the Landscape. "And this is the core of my Poetics: it is that metaphoric place I want to find, the place that fulfills me with knowing when I get there".

And what about the Germans?
The second chapter demonstrates—through [a] design—how the first chapter’s assumption can be brought into matter and reality.
Here, a short story about a design reveals a modus operandi for an architect who wants to produce meaning through the deeper findings in the Landscape and the self.

**Keywords.** Landscape; place; embryo; poetic image; knowing; techné; poiesis; self; meaning.

**Added Value as the Meaning of Life?**

That day, he stepped out his door to walk into the garden. He teared down fences and trepassed into the Landscape. He considered himself as a fortunate man, not for being rich, but for being mentally able to imagine himself, his house and his garden as the evident continuum of the Landscape. He had been blessed and purified by both course and duration of life, and been enabled to develop his own spacial intelligence (Van Schaik 2008), urging him to step into the Landscape in order to observe his own house and looking accurately at his own place in the world, his condition humaine, from a distance, critically, combining painful self-reproach on omnipresent pasts with encouraging intentions towards bright near futures in irrepresible streams of consciousness.

Looking at the achievements of his past and after having read architectural theories for days and days, he was happy to finally discover the Landscape as a solid piece of real and smelly matter, spread out in undulating surfaces that seemed to come from far beyond ancient geology, circling around him and then—

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55 This narrative first has been published in Conditions N°4, pp.72-75, Joana da Rocha Sà Lima, Tor Inge Hjemdal, Anders Melsom eds., Oslo, Norway, p. 71-75. Van Den Berghe, J. (2010.a), and has been minimally adapted so as to fit into this Ph.D.
all of a sudden—coming directly in his direction, swiftly, with horrifying silence, physically curving under his feet until he saw it mutate into a generous and protecting morphology behind his back.

Observing this setting by inches, he discovered a place with strange configurations [image 1]: two parallel ridges stretched out in the Landscape and spaced an excavation (Rossi 1981), some seventy meters wide, a hundred meters long and about one man deep. In his wildest imagination, these could be the remains of a meteorite, but relying on his intuition, he rather presumed the traces of ancient human intervention, knowing that his intuition was being refined through the systematic storage of a lifelong flow of experiences.

Back in his study, he made phone calls, then he spent hidden hours in archives in his basement and basements and attics of other old buildings, comparing telephone conversations with the paper archaeology of old maps and stories and calculations. And all this confirmed what he heard, as a newcomer in the village, many years before, when he spent windy late November midnights in the village pub, discussing the height of the ceiling and the darkness of the wood. He knew, as an architect, this ceiling was too low according to the latest building regulations for pubs, but still he fiercely defended this circumstance, in the meanwhile raising his hand like Le Corbusier’s Modulor-Man to demonstrate the easy reaching of the ceiling and granted this gesture a fundamental human quality, not only for its subversive state of being, but especially for the intimate character this size provoked, with measures very closely connected to the size and scale of a man making gestures while drinking beer with friends in a village pub at a dark midnight. Then—heaven knows why—one of the guys compared this scene with the size and height of an excavation in the Landscape behind the house of the architect, within walking distance, stating that this excavation had been dug out for the production of bricks some one hundred years ago, with which many houses of the village had been built ever since, "... including the one hundred year old house you live in, Mister architect". Elder members of the pub used nodding as a silent confirmation. Sudden silence. Then one of them, sitting in the dark corner where the oak counter met the brick side wall of the fireplace against which he was leaning, proclaimed that “even my cows like that excavation, because it protects them from northern winds, and they don’t want to escape from their meadow as their place, and that’s good for me!

Hilarity.

And now he knew: the excavation provides the Landscape with a slightly sunken space that provides man and animal with protection against the wind, while at the same time it provided the village with the clay to transmute unprotected feelings into bricks that had been added, brick by brick [image 2], to already existing piles of bricks in the solid masses of masonry with which many houses and stables in the village have been built [image 3].
Added value has been created, due to smart human intervention, both by excavating the Landscape and producing bricks with the excavated matter. Adding value emerges when it connects past and future through the intervening human being in the present, with the evolution of time as a series of links in an endless chain that runs over the turning wheel of ‘now’.

What about the Germans?

This knowledge comforted him deeply. He had discovered a more profound layer of the self through the discovery of a deeper layer of meaning in the context, and it had triggered him to start designing an architecture, now based on the awareness of the self in the Landscape, starting from the question how these ridges could be the cradle for the Embryo—the Poetic Image (Pérez-Gómez, A. 2006.a) of his new architecture, an architecture he began to see more and more as a decent replacement of the womb, an act so indispensable for every human being after birth: providing men and women with physical and mental protection, and by doing so, adding value and meaning to their seemingly coincidental unprotected lives in the seemingly coincidental unprotected places they are born in, with deep respect for the place, which means: without taking away value from the place that had inspired him to come that far on his mental Richter scale … . An architecture without theft.

Now he wanted to make new designs in a Design Cycle, in this place, this in-between (van Eyck 1962/2008)) the ridges in the meadow and the house he lived in, with the possibility to operate as a master builder in places other than this one: not! an architecture coming out of mental aut(oma)lism (= a ‘Style’), but fruits from a state of mind of the architect, based on the honest application of an embodied experience of place and meaning. And this master builder’s ambition to make corresponds with the Classical Greek connotation: poiesis, which means ‘to make’ in real matter in the first place, and by doing so, possibly resulting in ‘poetry’, so necessary to be humanly complete.

According to him, this Design Cycle should consist of four stages, being four designed artefacts.\textsuperscript{56} Firstly, he prefers to dream in the Landscape, which means: to design and build the birth of a house out of [the material of] a ‘brick’ Landscape. Subsequently, he wants to come out of the Landscape, to come home and enter the house. Then comes the time to leave the house in its fall, completely overgrown with ivy. Finally, he wants to design the process of disappearance and the way the house dissolves in the landscape again.

These four designs constitute a longitudinal section of the Landscape he walked in at the beginning of this story, that demonstrates the chronological process of becoming of an architect[ure], and a longitudinal section of the core of making architecture, in which ‘to make’ = ‘to poein’, or Techné equals Poiesis [image 4].

\textsuperscript{56} Making architecture inevitably deals with the paradox of the artefact. An artifact is on the one hand artificial, while on the other hand the architect struggles with the ambition to add the artificial artefact as something valuable to the ‘naturality’ of the site and humanity.
What about the Germans, in 1914, after Sarajevo, entering our house uninvited, installing themselves in all the best rooms for the duration of a wartime, sending the inhabitants to the stables for a four year minimal shelter. Then, in 1917, running out of copper supply, they collected the copper doorknobs to produce ammunition shells, copper bullets stolen from the Landscape in order to kill, taking away the crown of common good of the house that had granted them with imposed hospitality. And the son of the house shivered in the stables, in that cold winter of 1917. He resisted the Blitzkrieg later on, remembering the copper doorknobs that had been transformed into FLAK-shells\(^5\), as a volunteer in the Royal Air Force, being shot down, his Spitfire making smokey lines curling downwards above Bremen, in the spring of 1944.

Would he be able to tell and talk about the meaning of life, and by doing so, adding value to our common good?

Shell-shocked I feel, just like you do … .

Jo Van Den Berghe, March 2010.

Images
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[1] the discovered excavation in the Landscape [jvdb, 11-2009©]
[2] bricks: an additional process of piling [jvdb, 02-2010©]
[3] maconry, or bricks piled by addition to an already existing building mass, applied here to build a brickyard [jvdb, 02-2010©]
[4] sketch of the design research concept, a part of the doctoral research of the author [jvdb, 06-2009 / 01-2010©]

\(^{57}\) FLAK: Fliegerabwehrkanone, an essential component of the German anti-aircraft warfare.
The Cycle:

1. Genero of brick: excavation generates protection in the landscape.
2. The home of brick ['Red House'] generates protection in the landscape.
3. The dug-out [Point of Looking Back, and Forward to 4.]
4. The dug-in = the final protection. [Point of Arrival]

Architecture is the failed equilibrium of the works.

These drawings are followed by notes on the endpapers of the book, in which the author discusses the relationship between architecture and the natural landscape.

[References to images of Leonardo da Vinci, James Stirling, and others are mentioned.]