

Artefact submission

## **Verbiest – house and workshop in a warehouse**

### **A/ A RESEARCH STATEMENT And B/ PROPOSAL OF HOW IT WILL BE PRESENTED**

AgwA's project of transformation of a warehouse in Molenbeek into a house and a workshop is running from 2018 on and is currently under construction. One of the partners of the office being the client, we afforded to start the works leaving many questions open. The design process has been intensively going on along with the realization of the works, the main rules being that we need to respect approximatively the building permit and that what has been done cannot be undone.

During this long, intensive, somehow chaotic process, maybe more than in other cases, the project was caught in a storm of contingencies. Some of them, usual influences from other projects, people you meet, references you discover or on which a new light is shed. Some other ones, more profound changes in the perception of things and in the assumptions that substantiate creative choices and projections in life. The disease and the loss of a son. The burst of environmental awareness in society – regardless of its hypothetical depth and long-term significance. Some other ones still, more subtle paradigmatic shifts or slight shifts in interests percolating from research and pedagogic projects, from readings, maybe even from movies watch and poetry you read.

Obviously, on the one hand, these contingencies operate at the subjective level of a creative individual. They can be shared by a collectivity, or not, depending on their nature. They can even become a common ground for a designing team. On the other hand, the individuals are multiple, so are the influences. This intersecting clouds can be expected to be moving and multiple.

Of course, a project framing in a running practice also has a somehow stable core of *praxemes*<sup>i</sup> informing the practice and ensuring its coherence.

“Verbiest” will be presented here focusing on the cloud of contingencies, influences and references, thoughts and interrogations that circulated around the project, from one subjective point of view. In this way, it is not a linear account of a process, like the recent “Philippe Vander Maren & Richard Venlet In Practice”<sup>ii</sup>. It is of course not a critical or holistic review attempting to disclose the ultimate truth about an artefact. It is rather suggesting the universe of countless moments, discoveries, thoughts, actions and reflections that only find their coherence in the production of a project. As if the project was the material embodiment of a subjective network of apparently unrelated abstractions. A subjective network which does not exclude other, probably intersecting ones, each mirroring the point of view of personalities engaged in the process.

The setup of the Artefact will be threefold.

First, a long table, about 8 square meter (2\*4 or 1\*8m), will document the current state of the project, representing some objective description of the object “as it is”. On the table, documents are placed in a way not dissimilar to the taxonomic landscapes described by Tomas Ooms<sup>iii</sup>. A grey cardboard scale model (1/200), plans and sections, visual representations of the project (pictures taken from the BIM model in progress, two axonometries (one of them being developed now), one perspective section (being developed now), pictures from the work site by AgwA and by photographer Severin Malaud. All these documents are representations of the project in its actual state at some point of the process.

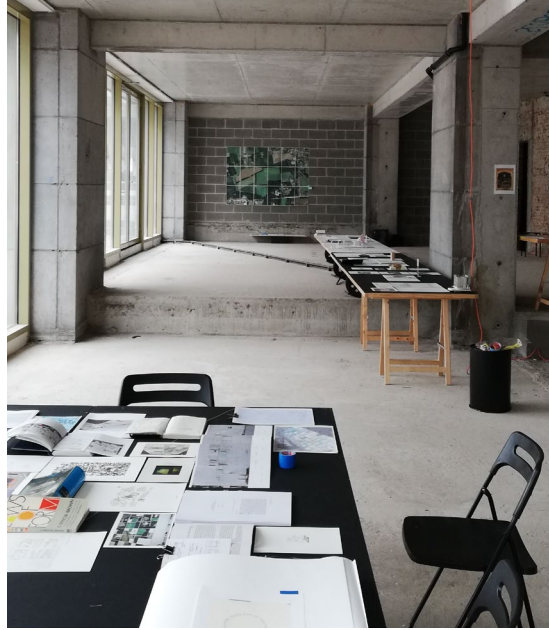


Figure 1 Ooms Tomas, taxonomic landscapes used during the "In Practice" seminar, KU Leuven faculty of Architecture, Noord, May 2019

Second, a screen or beamer shows a changing combination of three elements. On the upper side of the screen, two images are juxtaposed. The left half presents referential elements (the contingent influences mentioned above). The right half presents project related documents (extracts from the design process, like work documents, sketches, pictures of the scale model and of the construction site, sketches from or to the engineers, etc.). Below, a short textual caption works like a comment on the combination of images. These captions are extracts from reflections, texts, literature, mail exchanges, reflections from the period related to the project.



Figure 2 example of a combination of one referential image (top left), one project-related document (top right) and one caption (lower part)

The page consists of random selections of documents from three databases, and is coded as a dynamic webpage. Every ten seconds, the screen is refreshed and a new selection appears. Similar mechanisms were used in playful combinatory sense making artefacts, which were later included in the PhD Thesis of one of the authors (Harold Fallon)<sup>iv</sup>. One of them was the combination of an image

with a random combination of one adjective (modality) and a noun (an attitude, a type, a way of working). Another one followed a lecture on Wittgenstein's house in Wien, combining a fixed plan view of the house with a rapidly changing sentence combining words about signification following the simple structure "... is the ... of ...".



### revolutionary one liner

[click to recombine](#)

SENSE PRODUCER ([help](#))

[to AgwA](#)

Figure 3 Fallon Harold, Sense Producer, 2007



Figure 4 Presentation of the sensemakers (including « Touring Lanaken », in the Harold Fallon's PhD defense setup

In both cases, these small playful "sensemakers" cause an interpretative urgency. It is hardly possible to look at them without trying to look for a possible intentional meaning. The Wittgenstein sensemaker is also a comment on the house itself – meaning that the combinatory strategy is not only illusory, but also able to carry a signification on its own. Now, with this new sensemaker, the combinatory structure created a rich (saturated?) environment, in which the referential image, the project-related document and the caption comment and complement each other, producing an almost palpable but ever escaping signification. If the project is a subjective network, this multiple, combinatory artefact embodies it, as if it were another instance of the project itself. Each combination is rich enough to make sense, and concise enough to be graspable. The permanent recombination results in the objective exhaustion of all possibilities.

In this sensemaker, the items composing each screen are not referenced nor commented. It is the suggestive power of each element independently and of their combination which is explored here. Just as the project as a result is mute and explicit in itself, carrying its own evidence beyond the narrative structures it affords.

The third is a standard A4 vertical booklet with the exhaustive compilation of the documents from the two above. Each document is referenced and commented if necessary. For instance, the

apparition of the house of Frank Gehry as a reference requires some explanation. The booklet also contains this explanative text, *mise en abyme* of a snake biting its own tail.

The threefold presentation explores a possible medium to create artefacts which somehow can be considered equivalent to the project itself. Through the embodiment of a network of inputs and outputs in a creative act. By enlarging the scope to the entire process and to the stimuli surrounding it. While respecting the subjective nature of such networks. In order to provoke the interpretation of the project by the audience. Resulting in statistic objectivation through the endlessness actualization of graspable combinations.

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<sup>i</sup> Fallon, Harold, « Metarbitrariness ? », PhD Thesis, book 1, p 92

*“Praxeme is a contraction of “praxis” (action) and “semeion” (sense, meaning). I use it to refer to a piece of knowledge that cannot be considered independently from the practice. It is distilled from the practice and informs the practice”*

<sup>ii</sup> Fallon, Harold, Vandenbulcke, Benoît, Vander Maren, Philippe, Venlet, Richard, Chabard, Pierre, « Philippe Vander Maren & Richard Venlet, In Practice », Ara Mer, 2019

<sup>iii</sup> Ooms, Tomas, « Arrows of Operationality : (un)folding the manifold work(s): taxonomic landscapes (TL) of artefacts, in the proceedings of the CA2RE Berlin 2018 conference for Artistic and Architectural (Doctoral) research,p. 74-75

<sup>iv</sup> Fallon, Harold, « Metarbitrariness ? », PhD Thesis, book 1, p 117-118

*“Combinatory sense making : Dada, the cadavre exquis, Oulipo... I may be wrong, but in these approaches, I feel there is a fascination about the results of the combinations. Indeed, miracles can occur, which would not have happened without the input of randomness. In my case, these kinds of methods are not really embedded in the practice to enhance creativity or to discover unexpected possibilities. Rather, I think that the combinatory methods are used in the playful -one could even say superficial exploration of some issues. Then, they are also present more deeply in the structure of things. In the sensemakers, it is not the combinations that matter, but the structure that makes them possible.”*