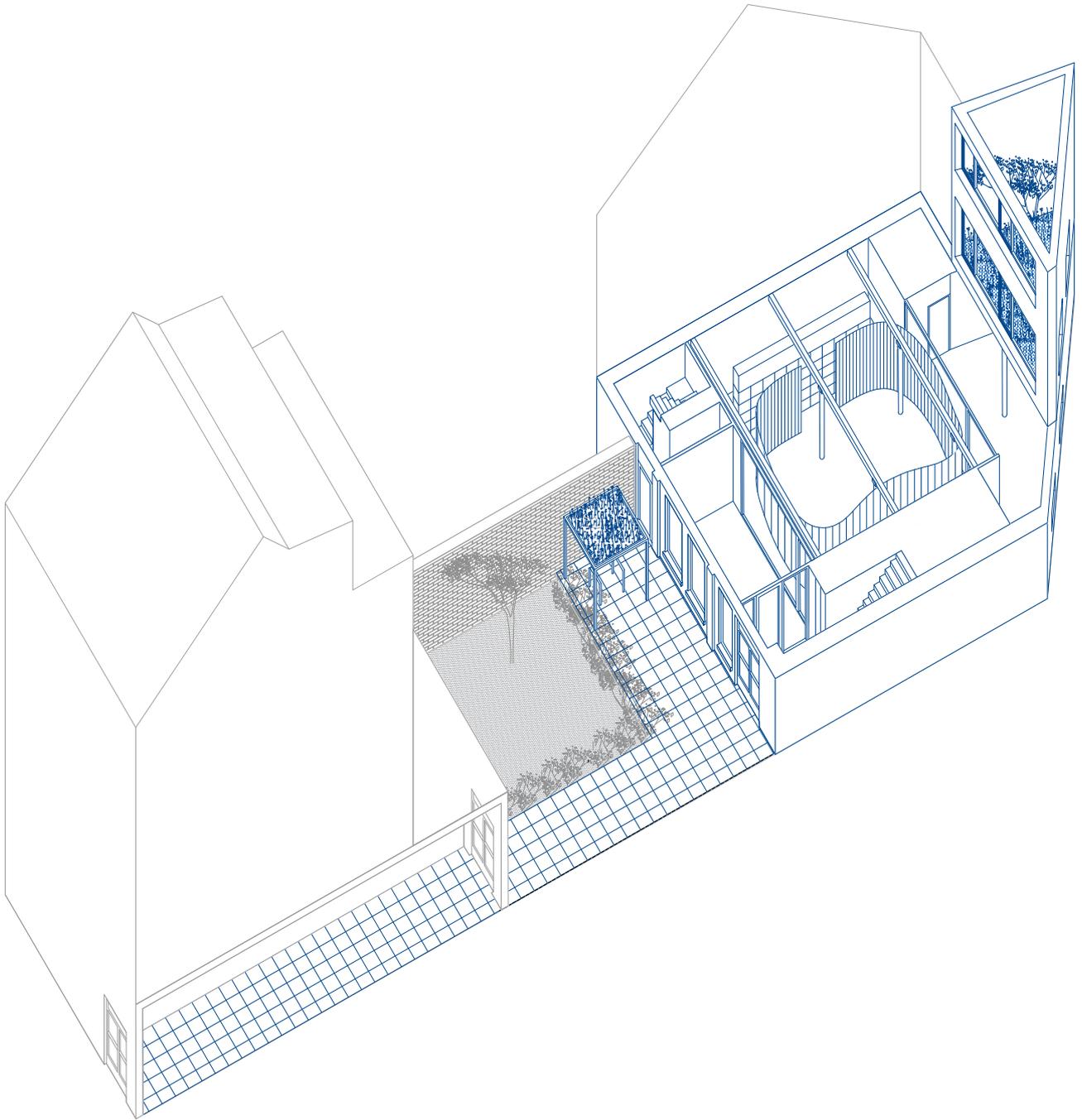


KU Leuven  
Faculty of Architecture  
Campus Sint-Lucas Brussels  
Academic year 2020/2021

Master Thesis

# SO CLOSE FAR AWAY

Promotor: Johan Nielsen



Maison des droits humains, mna, 2020

# Introduction

A PRACTICE UNDER TENSIONS

## Introduction: a practice under tensions

The studio aims to explore a conceptual gap between our objectives as designers and the reality of the practice. Indeed, it is time to consider a major paradox contemporary architectural practices are facing. On the one hand, discourses in architectural discipline are pushing for more and more dedicated interventions, carefully crafted to respond local challenges, singular contexts and unique social configurations. This dedication is necessary to reach high standards in terms of sustainability.

On the other hand, in their daily labor, architects are facing growing tensions linked to emerging forces at play in the discipline. Political agendas and economical requirements, competitions strategies, expanding corpus of norms and regulation, inflation of data and studies are forces that must be acknowledged as constitutive of the professional practice nowadays. These forces involve growing unpredictability and uncertainty in the conduction of the architectural design process and its possible outcomes. It can thus be stated that the uncertainty linked to the practice is barely considered in the rather idealistic view of the architect's work as described in the discipline's discourses. In a way, these forces induce a distance between the architects and the human beings that will experience the buildings. Architects and inhabitants are so close from each other, but far away.

To address this paradoxical situation, the studio considers the conceptual distance between design process and building afterlife as an enriching opportunity. A wish for a better personal and collective life deserves to be accurately handled in the design process, whatever the ambivalence of the stakeholders, the possible distrust in the procedures and the unpredictability of the results. Seizing this opportunity implies to answer questions such as 'How to preserve the essential relation to the user, the preoccupation for a person, a community, a public, when the design process turns into an obstacle course?' or 'How can a design be convenient, adequate, for private and collective life when, after all, the designer can be merely considered as a stranger?'



# Studio Frameworks

BRUSSELS, CLAUSEWITZ, EHESS, AND OTHERS



Heyvaert neighborhood

## The studio

The dynamic of the studio is based on a dialectic between two standpoints: a pragmatic standpoint and a conceptual standpoint.

First, the pragmatic standpoint. It will be underpinned by the site selection and the related stakeholders. This year, the selected site is the Heyvaert neighborhood, situated between Porte de Ninove and Cureghem Abattoir, in the south of Brussels. As a matter of fact, an urban *Objet Trouvé* is being slowly excavated from the urban fabric. Trace of the former river that once flowed across the city of Brussels, the Senette is an unexpected urban form that challenges the codes of the conventional city. The discovering of this urban piece is the opportunity to reshuffle the cards and respond the social challenges the neighborhood is facing. Fostering of collective facilities, implementation of small industries or densification of housing are among the urgencies at stake in the area. The traces of the existing can be re-used to build the city to come upon the existing city. The issue here is the outline the challenges, intimate and collective, the sites are facing. With an important degree of latitude, the students will be invited to select a site in the area, or to choose a parallel site, inspired by the challenges at stake in the area. Through personal field research, the forces at play in the area will be disentangled. Besides, the tackling of the site will be the opportunity to meet professional stakeholders working on the area. The studio is held in collaboration with the team of the Brussels Bouwmeester (bMa, see below). These encounters will give insights on the professional reality of the discipline. In addition, specific field protagonists will be identified and contacted.

# The Studio

THE PRAGMATIC STANDPOINT



Heyvaert neighborhood

# The Studio

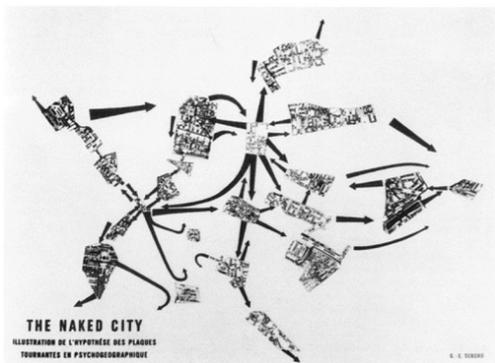
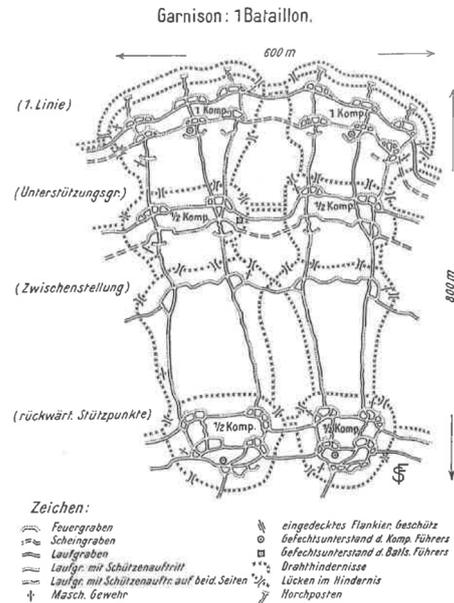
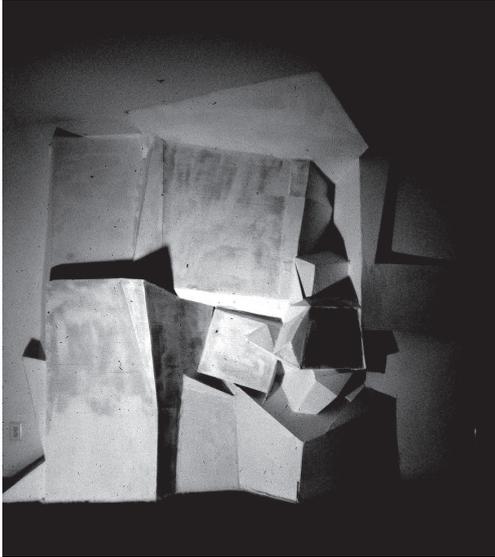
THE PRAGMATIC STANDPOINT



Heyvaert neighborhood

# The Studio

THE CONCEPTUAL STANDPOINT



Second, the conceptual standpoint. The studio is a collective and prospective journey, exploring the potentialities of the design process itself. It will examine how the fabrication of architectural artefact can have an influence on future afterlife, how the tensions at play in the process can be turned positively. This journey is research based. This research can be theoretical, but it can also take other forms. The student will be invited to build and explain his/her own methodology, engaging with other through the meticulous production of well-crafted and beloved documents.

The process will be a personal design development and conceptual research.

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# The Studio

STAFF AND PARTNERS



A Landmark Within Urban Rooms, Eva Jorissen, 2020.

## Studio staff and partners

Johan Nielsen is an architect working in Brussels. He is a PhD candidate with his research project entitled “Far Away, so close, a research on the remote architectural practice and local intelligences”. He is also involved in private practice as director of Manger Nielsen Architects (MNA), currently developing several mid-scale public projects in Brussels. He was previously in charge of the Confidence Studio (Master 1) at the faculty. For any information regarding this studio, please contact [johan.nielsen@kuleuven.be](mailto:johan.nielsen@kuleuven.be).

The studio is being held in collaboration with Brussel’s Bouwmeester (bMa). Julie Collet, from bMa’s team will be the studio guest that will present the challenges and perspectives at stake on the site. For more information about the bMa, please visit [www.bma.brussels](http://www.bma.brussels).

The studio is being held in collaboration with the architecture office Manger Nielsen Architects. The expertise of the office will support the student’s personal approach. For more information about the office, please visit [www.mangernielsenarchitects.eu](http://www.mangernielsenarchitects.eu).

# The Studio

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