Beyond the Mandate of the Architect.

Or How Inquisitive Practitioners Redefine it.

Johan De Walsche
UAntwerpen

Christine Fontaine
ZED architects
UCLouvain

Wouter Van Acker
ULB

Tensions and discrepancies

What is "in" the mandate and what reaches "beyond"? What is the mandate of an architect anyway? What to think of the inclination of the architect to systematically do more than strictly what a client asked for? This topic has been little theorised in academic literature, probably because it is a matter of practice. This chapter reports on an in-depth analysis of six research practices, described in a set of academic papers, submitted by architects who participated in the "Beyond the Mandate" symposium in March 2023 in Brussels.[1] It inquires into how they deal with these questions in their country and how they relate them to history, law and theory. We will provide some speculative answers as we ponder over and question the role and position assumed by the architect in regards to the mandate given by the commissioner.

The notion "beyond the mandate" evokes crossing or transgressing a limit. But beyond what? If we relate this notion to the definition of the legal liabilities of the profession of the architect, there are as many possible answers to this question as there are different definitions of the responsibilities of architects throughout the world. The Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) refers to this variation of the definition of the practice of the profession across Europe:

> *In Europe, planning and building activities are subject to special regulations, which are based on general interest.*

---

1   Practices in Research #04 practice-based research seminar, 'Beyond the Mandate', organised at the CIVA and Faculty of Architecture, ULB, Brussels, 7 March 2023.

The nature of these regulations, to which the stakeholders are bound, varies greatly from country to country. In all Member States of the EU, architects carry liability for the work they undertake. This liability arises from the duty of care that architects owe to their clients as well as to society in general. The ability to act independently of vested interests on behalf of society is a characteristic feature of liberal professions and much cherished by architects. Nevertheless, there is a need to ensure that the liability imposed on architects is balanced against the range of their duties and the influence an architect can exert on a project during his or her working life. [2]

This definition balances two time frames - the time of the project (and by extension the life of a building) and the career of the architect - when defining the liabilities within the "influence" and "duties" exerted on a project during the architects' career.

A client commissions an architect to design a building. By doing so, the client gives the architect the mandate to take up the responsibility to complete a specific job, entailing a set of roles, tasks and duties. The extent to which these roles, tasks and duties are legally determined, and hence intrinsically inscribed into the commission, may vary per country. While in countries such as Australia, the US or the UK, the title of architect is protected by law, and the practising architect is required to register with the national institute of architects, there is no legal requirement to hire an architect

2   Architects' Council of Europe, 'Practice of the Profession' accessed December 4, 2023, https://www.ace-cae.eu/practice-of-the-profession/,

when building single family residences under a certain size. In Belgium the signature of an architect is required on the plans of each house. In the early 80s, the controversial architect, Luc Deleu was summoned by the Belgian Order of Architects, when he put his signature as architect on the plans of hundred houses drawn and designed by the non-architect clients themselves.[3] While in France the mandate usually limits itself to the conception or design of the building only, and intervening in the construction phase could be a case of going beyond the mandate, in Belgium, not only the project design, but also the on-site inspection of the works is assumed to be part of the job description of the architect. Article 4 of the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for Belgian Architects stipulates that "the architect must have the independence to practise in accordance with the position, which is of public interest, and the rules of ethics so as to take responsibility for his actions." [4]

Here, a first tension appears. Since architecture is a matter of public interest, with the architect being the persona to secure this public interest, and not the commissioner in articulating the commission, a discrepancy may appear between what is asked to be done (by the commissioner) and the awareness, insights and societal duty of the architect about *what ought to be done*. [5] There might be a significant difference between

3   Lillian Dewachter, Luc Deleu & T.O.P. Office 1967-1991 (Antwerp: Muhka, 1991), 101.

4   Art.4 of the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice of 16 December 1983 as Established by the National Council of the Order of Architects (BOJ, 8 May 1985), Approved by Article 1 RD of 18 April 1985 (BOJ, 8 May 1985).

5   The distinction between "what is asked" and "what ought to be" is inspired by Jürgen Mittelstrass' notions of Verfügungswissen ("knowledge about what can be done") and Orientierungswissen (knowledge about "what ought to be done") as described in Maarten Simons. "'Education through Research' at European Universities: Notes on the Orientation of Academic Research." Article. Journal of Philosophy of Education, 40, no. 1 (2006): 31-50.

these two points of view. To which extent does the mandate entail aspects that are reaching beyond, or even go against the immediate interest of the commissioner? In the context of rapidly changing environmental and societal expectations, the brief might or might not explicitly request for features that are considered common practice or common sense today. Fulfilling such requests might bring the architect into a societally subversive position.

The discrepancy between the commission and the effective set of tasks, roles and duties it may imply, also leads to a second set of tensions regarding the workload entrusted to the architect. The Belgian Code of Conduct states that: "The architect will adjust the number and size of the engagements he accepts to suit his personal capacities, the resources at his disposal and the special demands imposed by the significance and circumstance of the services he renders."[6] In view of the size, specificity, complexity and circumstances of a specific commission, the architect is demanded to self-monitor the feasibility of what(s)he is able to handle, and to rely on external expertise if necessary.

Is going beyond the mandate then a mission the architect sets to oneself, expanding upon or reducing a commission, while operating within the legal constraints of the profession? Each of the contributions we received for the colloquium doesn't formulate a definite answer but anchors the position the architects take in regard to specific projects and specific cultural contexts in which they are operating. For example, in France and the Netherlands, the inspection of the construction

[6]   Code of Professional Conduct and Practice, article 4 (see note 2).

site is often delegated to an office in charge of the execution of the architect's design. In Belgium, architects are and feel responsible for the project from the first sketches to the end of the construction process. Therefore, what is beyond or within the mandate differs and depends on where the limits are drawn and where one positions oneself during the life span of a project.

Over time the responsibilities of an architect have been more and more defined in juridical terms. The duties of the architect end up being a normative list of obligations, which hardly includes any aesthetic or ethical sense, or qualitative, symbolic or even simply human engagement. It is therefore all the more important to determine for oneself what is in one's mandate beyond the legal and contractual frame.

Hijacking the mandate

Is going beyond the mandate a way to engage with buildings from a critical viewpoint, from a distance? The following paragraphs sketch out different views and paths which practitioners developed to address the discrepancies, tensions and unease that are caused by the difference between what is asked to be done and what ought to be done. The themes, stances and strategies that are presented have been distilled out of an in-depth analysis of six papers written by inquisitive practitioners, in response to the "beyond the mandate" symposium and the debates it has induced. Two types of underlying drivers to go beyond the mandate can be discerned: (i) an unwillingness to continue the job as it has

been trained, and as demanded by the market, ("no more BaU") and (ii) annoyance or irritation of the architect regarding the narrowness of the project briefs of the commissioner.

No more BaU

The symposium revealed reluctance from certain young professionals, trained and graduated from architecture programmes, to adhere to the prevailing understanding and normative expectations of architectural design practice. They go beyond the mandate because they feel they have to, as they take their professional and civic role seriously. They are convinced that the changed conditions of how we look at the world, intrinsically imply a transformation of architectural practice as well. Oliver Burch, Jakob Junghanss, and Lukas Ryffel (8000.agency) formulate this as follows:

> *As trained architects, we have been taught a broad range of tools, concepts and methods to read our world and order it by the logics of gravity, utility and composition. We have sometimes also been taught in sociology, economy, ecology, whatsoever. But in a world as ambivalent and unpredictable as ours, how can we use these skills in a meaningful way? How can we spot latent potential and create momentum to transform it?* [7]

These practitioners no longer want to run "business as usual". The term "business as usual", abbreviated as BaU, originates in environmental studies. It was adopted by the

---

[7]   Oliver Burch, Jakob Junghanss, and Lukas Ryffel (8000.agency), "No Clue - Clues. Working with the Morelli method", Practices in Research #04, (December 2023), 58.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2007, to refer to the dramatic scenario that would happen when continuing the way of living and producing as we do, instead of urgently implementing measures for reducing global warming.[8] Although the discourse about climate change was acknowledged by the discipline soon after, the awareness that it would also affect architectural practice fundamentally, came late and slowly. Pierre Bouilhol and Agrippa Leenhardt (ANMA) argue that when the ecological narrative finally penetrated the architectural debate - it was in the late 2000s - it led either to a reductionist understanding of architecture dominated by science and technology, or to a marginalisation of activist minorities.[9] The shift induced by anthropocene thinking in the 2010s was "weavering the way in which architects took up the ecological issue", and finally arrived in the 2020 as what is refered to as the *terrestrial turn.* [10]

Bouilhol and Leenhardt don't believe that the necessary re-orientation of the discipline can happen from within. Close interactions with other disciplines have to be established. They provide an example of such a collaborative framework:

> *Understanding hydraulic dynamics through the expertise of the hydrologist informs us about the capacity of soils to infiltrate water and become the support for ever more*

---

8   IPCC, 2007, IPCC, Climate Change 2007: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, (Cambridge University Press (2007).

9   Pierre Bouilhol and Agrippa Leenhardt (ANMA), "Uncertain Soils in Experimentation. Architects and Scientists Representing the Plural Values of Soils," Practices in Research #04 (December 2023), 96-97.

10   "terrestrial turn" is a term coined by technology philosophers Pieter Lemmens, Vincent Blok and Jochem Zwier, to expand "the now dominant microlevel analyses of concrete artefacts and particular social use contexts favoured and promoted by what has been called the 'empirical turn' since the 1990s, to a philosophy of technology as a planetary phenomenon". Pieter Lemmens, Vincent Blok, and Jochem Zwier. "Toward a Terrestrial Turn in Philosophy of Technology." Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology 21, no. 2/3 (2017): 123.

specific living environments, which the ecologist reveals. The soil scientist tells us how the soil functions, the geologist teaches us about the long-term dynamics of the subsoil, which the geographer, sociologist or economist cross-references with the successive dynamics of human settlements.[11]

And since their ultimate goal is to induce a shift in perspectives on mechanisms of valuation and financialization, real estate actors have to become part of this interactive process. The mandate has necessarily become trans-disciplinary, inducing moments "of learning and breaking down barriers of expertises and particular interests to arrive at a shared understanding" of the commission."[12] However, so the authors continue, in spite of the ever-increasing need for expertise, commissioners have little knowledge of each of these soil-related disciplines and have only limited soil related data available. As a result, commissioning authorities rarely integrate such collaborations into the project process. [13]

The urge to cease from BaU, and go beyond the mandate, doesn't necessarily lead practitioners to the macro scale of urban planning, or to conduct research outside the discipline. Also within the architectural discipline, and at the micro scale of the building, there is room for change and need for expansion of the mandate. Lieven Nijs (BLAF) heavily criticises how the predominant construction mode

11   Bouilhol and Leenhardt (ANMA), "Uncertain Soils," 98-99.
12   Bouilhol and Leenhardt (ANMA), "Uncertain Soils," 99.
13   Bouilhol and Leenhardt (ANMA), "Uncertain Soils," 93.

of the brick-faced cavity wall unquestionably perseveres, in spite of its myriad of fundamental architectural "paradoxes", at all levels, not only regarding climate change, but also broader, conceptually.[14] Attempts of further developing this construction mode would be a case of doing the wrong thing better. Instead, BLAF explores alternative construction methods. He argues that material knowledge and expertise is available within the discipline, but has remained largely unexploited. By reassembling existing technical and material knowledge and expertise, and linking it with architectural theory and history, He built up a new state-of-the-art for the discipline, and hence a source of inspiration for what a contemporary mandate ought to be. His line of reasoning is not built on theory only, but grounded in one decade of exploratory experimentation throughout real building practice, embodied in a series of case study houses.

A third response regarding the unease to continue BaU is to shift the stance regarding the mandate. Instead of understanding a commission from its content and functional requests, it is understood in terms of required attitudes and stances to reach a desired outcome. Stéphane Damsin and Jan Haerens (Ouest) argue that instead of continuing the Western modernist vision that building a new world implies building new buildings, they argue that everything is already there. The city is built and rebuilt on itself.[15]

14   Lieven Nijs (BLAF), "Big Brick Hybrids. Learning by building beyond the mandate," Practices in Research #04 (December 2023).

15   The quotes from Ouest are taken from a paper presented at the symposium but not published in this issue, and from the extended abstract, that was part of the symposium programme booklet. "Teatro, lo Tuyo es Puro Teatro" Practices in Research, practice-based research seminar, Beyond the Mandate, (March 2023): 129-137, accessed December 4, 2023, https://architectureinpractice.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Program%20and%20extract_5_compressed.pdf

> *The condition of unfinished symphony. A city is never done, never accomplished. In an architecture magazine, even about projects working with existing, there is often a clear before/after dialectic where the after is not only way better than the before, but moreover considered or presented as a final result. It's a kind of self-satisfied way of seeing, which fortunately disappears as soon as you walk around the city.*[16]

As an architect, you are free to decide which commissions to take, and which to leave. Too often and obvious young architecture practices are driven by the ideal to gradually acquire projects of an increasing scale. Likewise, too often, housing and urban renewal projects are articulated as large scale projects, thereby systemically overlooking the total impact of the myriads of small-scale interventions, resulting from modest commissions. Policy makers at the urban scale should include them in their future agendas as leverage for urban transformation, and ways should be found to make those commissions more attractive and economically remunerable for architectural offices. Also this is a way of taking architecture seriously as a matter of public interest. With their professional practice Ouest, Damsin and Haerens break with BaU by shifting attitudes: from aspiring for the big scale to valuing the modest intervention; by focussing on the urban void instead of on the buildings; by trying no to solve all the problems, but embracing ambiguities as drivers for encounter and negotiation, rather than as problems to be solved; by trying not to finish the job, but cherishing the

16   Stéphane Damsin, and Jan Haerens (Ouest), "Teatro," 132.

constantly unfinished state of the city, always inviting for adaptation and evolution, instead of aspiring for the delivery of completed buildings; and by upscaling projects by seeking dependencies, encounters and interaction, rather than by defining huge programmes.

A similar aversion for uncritically and obediently responding to commissions for urban renewal can be found in the work of 8000.agency. After having been involved in a few competitions for renewal of the urban housing stock, they conclude that the briefs, and the consequent commissions are based upon unfounded assumptions, impelling architects to act in unsustainable ways. Such briefs not only prevent architects from exploring alternative approaches and solutions, it even negates their duty to do so. While the mandate of an architect should intrinsically be based upon directing the requested project towards a more sustainable world, such commissions do the opposite. The following section of this chapter elaborates on these difficulties "to go beyond the mandate" out of an aspiration to transcend the status quo.

Transcending the status quo

The mediaeval philosopher Thomas Aquinas characterised the role of the architect by two features: (i) leading knowledge and foresight, meaning that he is the one who is able to conceive how a future could look like and how it could be made, and (ii) labour division, pointing to the fact that he is not the one who will realise it - this is the work of others.[17]

17   Merlijn Hurx, Architect en aannemer. De Opkomst Van De Bouwmarkt in De Nederlanden 1350-1530 (Nijmegen en 's-Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2012), 39-40.

On the one hand the commissioner expects the architect to execute what he asks for, on the other hand, he also expects the architect to be the professional who is in on the latest developments of the discipline. But how to respond to the request of a commissioner when you, as an expert, see other issues that matter, and know better? Why make an appeal to an architect if not because he is the one who knows both what can and what ought to be done? The inquisitive architect is eager to explore what the discipline can mean, and tries to keep pace with the newest developments, attitudes and strategies. He is in constant interaction with peers in order to quickly and efficiently exchange experiences and insights among each other. Consequently they act as "reporters from the front".[18]

The insight that it could be done differently and better than articulated in a commissioner's brief, makes architects feel that it becomes part of their mandate to redefine the commissions. For Ouest this means to understand a commission primarily as a call for intervening towards a healthy and lively city. In this regard the question should always be to which extent the commission is effectively staging the urban condition, strengthening meaningful interdependencies as neighbours, individuals and communities.

Michal Kulesza , and Tomasz Swietlik describe the story of a commission for an exhibition design.[19] Nothing special at

18   Reference to the title and theme of the Venice Biennale of 2016, curated by Alejandro Aravena.

19   Michal Kulesza, and Tomasz Swietlik, "Ruination Design." Practices in Research, #04 (December 2023). The exhibition was commissioned in 2018 by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (MSN), as part of "Neighbours" the 10th Warsaw Under Construction Festival (WWB),

first sight, albeit that the commissioner labelled the project unofficially as "high-risk" for several reasons. Firstly, the building where the exhibition should take place was not known yet, and when known it turned out to be a surprisingly complex, and under-documented building, with a societally charged legacy. Secondly, no exhibition brief was available. Instead of such a brief, composed by a curator, there was a horizontally organised art collective of 10 persons, intending to have a curatorial and artistic vision emerge during the process.[20] In fact, plenty of information was missing in the commission to act as a solid basis for a clear elaboration of the request. Instead of setting out a trajectory by themselves, the architects deliberately stepped aside, bringing the curatorial team of the exhibition to the front. Simultaneously, they started to investigate the building in search for hidden architectural gems, and, next to the curatorial team, they also made the building speak. By doing so, they shifted the mandate of the architect from frontman in the design project, to facilitator bringing two other voices to the front - the curatorial team as demanding guests, and the building as attractive host. Kulesza , and Swietlik thus not only mobilise their competences as architects for designing a building, but also for establishing a network of diverse actors - human (architects, curatorial team, artists,...) and non-human (the building, the artworks, the found "hidden gems",...) - and making them accomplice in the process. Consequently, driven by its own agency, this resulting actor-network induced an unpredictable self-directing project trajectory, steered by

addressing the capital's changing demographics, and Ukrainian immigration in particular.

20   Kulesza, and Swietlik, "Ruination Design," 132, 152-153. The group consisted of the Polish curator Szymon Maliborski, together with nine members of the Kyiv-based art collective VCRC (Visual Culture Research Centre).

what emerged - similar to the writer who feels that the story, during writing, gradually takes over. In contrast with BLAF or 8000.agency, who aim for transforming architectural practice by primarily relying on acquired architectural competence and expertise, Kulesza and Swietlik deliberately put aside those qualities, in order not to be biassed and fully open for the discovery of issues, just by being involved in a unfolding process of uncertain practice. Against the fear and suspense in the commissioner because of the uncertainty and many imponderables, the architects put in the capacity of cunning of uncertainty.[21]

Issues with a mandate not only refer to unclearness of the commission, as discussed in the case above. It happens that the commission is very clear, but not in line with what ought to be done today. 8000.agency charges against commissions for replacement of existing housing stock by new buildings. The predispositions of the commissioner prevent them from gathering sufficient information about other options. They contend: "How can you start working with the existing if you are missing all the information? And how can you raise your voice once the premise of demolition is already set."[22] Their strategy of going beyond the mandate resembles Ouest's attention for the small, turning "the seemingly irrelevant as revealing moments for a project." Similar to the work of a detective, the architects of 8000.agency "watch out for the overseen or unnoticed details – and transform them into

---

21 The term "cunning of uncertainty" refers to the title of a book by Helga Nowotny, 2016, where she discusses the need for providing new epistemologies and practices for scientific research conduct. Helga Nowotny, The Cunning of Uncertainty (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015).

22 Burch, Junghanss, and Ryffel (8000.agency),"No Clue - Clues," 64.

productive reactions."[23] They navigate through the ignorance of the commissioner by a strategy of civil disobedience, looking for loopholes in the rules: deliberately misreading the task, leading to a discourse on alternatives, and inducing many questions. Appealing to the rule of the Swiss competition system that all questions have to be answered by the organisers, and all answers have to be distributed among all participating teams, they composed a set of strategic questions and sent them to the organisers, who were now obliged to formulate answers and send them to all competitors. The result was an expansion of the commission with an additional set of information, such as the plans of the existing building, intended to be demolished, but also a long list of the many plants and animals that find a habitat on site. This extra information made other participants discover the richness of the existing, and confronted the organisers with the consequences of their brief. They made the formulation of strategic questions a tool of research in itself. Eventually, their activist strategy impacted the discourse about the demolition of seemingly obsolete housing estates thus breaking through the status quo of prevailing opinions about renewal of the housing stock.[24] Rather than spending their energy in disputing with the commissioner they "claimed the right to develop alternatives to what someone has decided decades ago".[25]

Also Bouilhol and Leenhardt (ANMA) point to limitations in briefs and competitions, due to limited knowledge and insights

23   Burch, Junghanss, and Ryffel (8000.agency),"No Clue - Clues," 59.

24   Burch, Junghanss, and Ryffel (8000.agency),"No Clue - Clues," 64-66.

25   Burch, Junghanss, and Ryffel (8000.agency),"No Clue - Clues," 70.

of urban development commissioners. Their conclusion however, is that you cannot blame the commissioner for not including in the brief something that has not been seen yet. More particularly they hold a plea for "making the city through the prism of soil".[26] A shift has to be made from considering soils as "surfaces to be urbanised"[27] to "soils as elements of a vital urban ecosystem".[28] This shift has to be made by those who are expected to have up-to-date knowledge and insights, namely the experts. It is a moral duty of the commissioned design team, in its competency of possessing up-to-date knowledge and insights, to address today's inescapable and undeniable concerns – such as care and caution towards soil - even if they were not part of the brief, and thus go beyond the mandate.

Emerging topics and tactics

A commission is not a mandate

The practices and strategies that are described above in terms of an unease to continue business as usual, and an urge to transcend the status quo, all witness an apparent discrepancy between what is asked to be done and what is ought to be done. Can this discrepancy be related to a difference in meaning and content between the two terms mandate and commission?

26   Bouilhol and Leenhardt (ANMA), "Uncertain Soils," 81.
27   Bouilhol and Leenhardt (ANMA), "Uncertain Soils," 79.
28   Bouilhol and Leenhardt (ANMA), "Uncertain Soils," 87.

The Oxford English Dictionary reminds us that the word "mandate" refers to a verb and a noun. As a noun, "mandate" is defined as "a command, order, or injunction", but also as "a commission". OED thus considers mandate and commission as synonyms for each other. As a verb however, OED defines "to mandate" as: "to commission or delegate authority to (a representative, group, organisation etc.).[29] To mandate an architect to design a building (and inspection of progress of the work) thus points to authority that is delegated to a specific person. "Authority", in that same OED, refers to "Power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience; moral, legal, or political supremacy."[30] To mandate an architect to design a building thus means to delegate the power to this person to give orders, make decisions and even enforce obedience. Such an interpretation sheds another light on the relationship between commissioner and architect. For the commissioner the status of the architect moves from being the supplier of services that he pays for, to an authority that takes over power of decision and rights to decide (from an acknowledged and accepted supremacy.

A similar exploration for the term "commission" tells us that, as a noun, it is understood as a "charge, instruction, or command to act in a particular manner on behalf of a superior authority." As a verb it means "to order or authorise the production, provision, or undertaking of (something)."[31]

29   Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "mandate," accessed December 4, 2023, https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=mandate..

30   Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "authority," accessed December 4, 2023, https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=authority.

31   Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "commission," accessed December 4, 2023, https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=commission.

In contrast with the "term" mandate, the term "commission" emphasises the authority of the one who commissions, over the one who is charged to undertake.

Apparently it is meaningful to make a distinction between "mandate" and "commission". It is remarkable to notice that both definitions ultimately refer to an hierarchic position of operating under the authority and by the permission of someone else. "Mandate" highlights the dependent position of the commissioner, while it emphasises the architect's obligation of constant study and personal development, to be up-to-date, and to be able to judge and decide. "Commission", in contrast, highlights the obligations of the architect "to act in a particular manner on behalf of the commissioner". The dialectics between a commission and the mandate imply a mutual accountability and hence a strong interdependency between the two parties. There is a triggering balancing relationship that invites constant negotiation and update of itself. Indeed, the commissioner then is the one who authorises the architect to take over the power of decision and rights to decide, on behalf of that commissioner.

The cases that are discussed here relate to inquisitive practitioners, who are eager to explore new and alternative ways of conceiving architecture because they feel an urge to better respond to the changing circumstances of our time. This results in self-initiated research, either within the discipline (BLAF, 8000.Agency), or by journeys to neighbouring disciplines (ANMA, Ouest,) leading to new insights that they want, and have to share and apply. In such cases the difference between what an (ignorant) commissioner expects

to receive, and the eventual response he receives from these inquisitive undertakers might significantly differ. Adhering business as usual, the commissioner will expect "variants" on what is known. In contrast, the inquisitive architect, who considers it his duty to thoroughly scrutinise the brief, will explore a wide range of possibilities. Other options than the obviously expected solutions may come into view. As a result, he might come up with an unexpected solution, an "alternative", instead of a predictable "variant". The more such leap from a variant (of BaU) to an alternative (in order to do better) happens, the more a discrepancy occurs between the notions "commission" and "mandate".[32]

A changing object of concern

The shift that ANMA refers to as "the terrestrial turn" is about more than just the inclusion of "soil" as an additional component of architectural design. The plea of Ouest to reconsider the role of architecture in urban design through artistic metaphors and imaginaries is about more than paying attention to small moments of daily life. The participatory approach adopted by Di Leo , and Ferretti is about more than completing the brief of urban renewal projects with desires and concerns of residents.[33] ANMA's discourse about soil is calling for a repositioning of architecture within a new entanglement of mutually interacting disciplines. Architecture can no longer be conceived in terms of its

---

32   A good discussion about the distinction between "variant" and "alternative" and its relevance for architectural design and design research can be found in Charlotte Geldof and Nel Janssens. "Van Ontwerpmatig Denken Naar Onderzoek." In Achtergrond 03 - Architect / Ontwerper / Onderzoeker? Casus Mare Meum: Een Oefening Op Zee (Antwerp: VAI, 2007.) (in Dutch).

33   Benedetta Di Leo, and Maddalena Ferretti, "Making Things. Practicing co-creation in the marginal territories of central Apennine," Practices in Research, #04 (December2023).

own materiality, but – similar as its iconic or symbolic meaning – in terms of how this materiality interacts with the physicality of the environment where it becomes a dynamic part of. Moreover, it cannot be conceived in terms of inhabitation (by humans) only, but as part of an organic ecosystem, acknowledging the "inhabitation" of worms in soil. As people are (actively and interactively) inhabiting a building, a building is (actively and interactively) inhabiting its environment. Ouest's attention for the small scale is about addressing a certain essentiality of the city that is currently overlooked by architects and planners, namely the staging of those beautiful interdependencies as neighbours, citizens, individuals and communities in the liveliness of the urban palimpsest. "One can push the door of an ordinary building and find oneself in a much larger and different universe than what it seems from the street". Although not, or insufficiently, "seen" by architects and planners these phenomena are grasped in other fields, such as theatre, cinema, music, visual art and comics.[34] It is thus possible to identify them, also by architects, if only to reach out to those disciplines. And since they thus can become part of the conception of architecture, they also should. Based upon a thorough awareness and appreciation of those interdependencies, including their contingency and unpredictability, architectural design becomes a matter of staging occasions and conditions where such interdependencies could occur and flourish. Next to the concern to design a spatial constellation that closely corresponds to a predefined programme, architectural design should be evaluated against its capacity to facilitate and favour these interdependencies. Di Leo and Ferretti's reliance

---

34   Damsin, and Haerens (Ouest), "Teatro," 131.

upon participatory approaches is not primarily aiming at revealing the desires of residents in order to include them in the project brief, but to reveal potentials of existing buildings, natural heritage, human capital, local expertise, and all the complexities and contradictions that are involved in the "wicked" problems, posed by urban reactivation. Consequently, not the residents' desires, nor a brief of functional demands, but the potentials of existing buildings, of natural heritage, of human capital and of local expertise become the building stones to design with. By doing so, they explore how the architectural project, and the practice of designing architecture can become a methodology in its own for facing and "wickedly" solving such complicated commissions.

The discourses that these inquisitive practitioners are developing are not to be understood as a mere expansion of what we know about architecture, but about what architecture is (or has to become). They call for reconsidering the constituents of architecture. It points to an ontological shift, reaching beyond the existing epistemological body of the discipline. It also implies a reconsideration of the essential components, features and concerns that architectural design has to take into account. From an understanding of architecture in terms of objects - buildings, urban plans and infrastructure - a shift is seen towards an understanding in terms of connections, interactions, and experiences that take place or are induced. The focus of the disciplinary debate is no longer attempting to define what architecture is, or what it means, but on how we live it, how it's done, how it operates, how it impacts and how it comes into being. These questions

are, according to Albena Yaneva, adjectival by nature - "not architecture but the architectural".[35]   In her words, it thus looks as if architecture is currently re-assembling "the architectural".

Architecture as a process

The symposium revealed practices that look at architecture as a component in the continuing transitory state of our environment, rather than in terms of its occasional deliveries - buildings. The architectural project then is understood as the active intervention - more particularly intervention with a spatial articulation - in this ongoing process of transition.

Burch, Junghanss , and Ryffel (8000.agency) decide to help people moving out of their homes, as a strategy to get into conversation with them. As they do, they discover unknown stories about how these people inhabited their building. Deliberately they have shifted their from the design question of conceiving a new building out of a brief, towards a curiosity in daily life, in order to gradually conceive what might be possible, and develop insights in how to intervene. This modus operandi fundamentally criticises the way in which projects, tenders or competitions are being defined. Instead of relying upon fixed ideas, rules and regulations Buch, Junghanss , and Ryffel break a lance for conceiving architectural interventions out of growing insights about a specific case on a specific place in a specific time. The architects suspend design action, insert a stage of inquiry and undertake specific actions in order

---

35   Albena Yaneva, Mapping Controversies in Architecture (Burlington: Ashgate Pub. Co., 2012), 108.

to develop such insights. They adopt what one could call an activist inquiry, sometimes leading to inquisitive activism, as for instance in their initiative to pose critical questions to the competition organisers. What is even more fundamental is that they reframe the architectural project from a disruptive understanding in terms of a new building to replace the old, into an intervention in the ongoing transitory condition that society is in.

Also Damsin , and Haerens (Ouest) are suspicious of predefined commission briefs that uncritically assume a building as the self-evident answer to an architectural question. Rather than projecting ideals about how we desire to live into a new building design, they suggest to reconsider the architectural project in terms of facilitating the unexpected, the intriguing, the disorder and "happy mess" that characterises daily urban life. No need to conceive a new "ideal" future, it is all already here. Designing architecture is primarily a matter of adopting an attitude and taking a stance towards how we look upon daily life, as it happens. The architectural project is basically to be understood as a timely intervention in the ongoing and continuously self-renewing theatre of (urban) life.

Kulesza , and Swietlik turned the high degree of contingency and uncertainty of their commission from a challenge of themselves, into a condition that allowed others - in their case curators and artists - to come into view and take up a role in the conception of the architectural project. It reminds of John Habraken's reasoning that the architect is not the one who is to be creative, but the one who creates the conditions that make it possible for the inhabitants to be creative; and

in its turn, the urban planner is the one who has to create the conditions that make it possible for the architects to create the conditions that make it possible for the inhabitants to be creative.[36] But in addition to this space for creativity by others, Kulesza , and Swietlik highlight how transformative a distributed engagement in the design project can be. The agency of a shared commitment among a diversity of actors, and the persistent alertness of all for responding to what emerges during the process, results in a mandate that no longer pertains to the eventual physical product outcome only, namely the renovated building with its and the exhibition that it contained, but that extends itself by explicitly including the process of investigating the building, "making its architecture speak",[37] and the public debate that this inquisitive process and distributed engagement induced.

The inclination to redefine the architectural project in terms of the processes it induces rather than of the built objects it envisages, reminds of "Freespace", the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale. Curators Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara stated that "Architecture affects everyone, so it's like a human right" and placed at the heart of architects' concerns "a generosity of spirit and a sense of humanity at the core of architecture's agenda … with the aim of promoting the 'desire' of architecture".[38] On this occasion, the collective of French architects Encore Heureux asked themselves the

36   John Habraken, The Appearance of the Form, four essays on the position designing takes between people and things (Cambridge, Awater Press, 1985. Second ed. 1988).

37   To "make architecture speak" refers to a suggestion of Jeremy Till as being one of the ways to go for conducting proper architectural research. Jeremy Till, "Three Myths and One Model." Building Material, no. 17 (2008): 4-10.

38   Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara, opening statement brochure Biennale architettura 2018, 16th International Architecture Exhibition, accessed December 4, 2023, https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2018..

question: "Building buildings or places?". They experimented with "collective processes for inhabiting the world and building commons,... Open, possible, unfinished places, which establish spaces of freedom where alternatives are sought."[39] These stances might be reminiscent of the activist and collaborative participatory approaches originating in the 60s, by architects such as Lucien Kroll. In order to reach their ideals of prioritising collective action and decision-making, they involved ample mediation with residents, construction site workers, and artists.[40] The new generation however, targets a broader scope, and aspires to a wider outreach. While the participatory movements were focused on instigating bottom-up action, the new generation explicitly addresses policy makers and real estate agents. Their goal is not only to empower residents and primary users, but also, and to the same extent, to make powerful agents accomplice in the consequences of the commissions they launch. Next to their own disciplinary expertise, they bring together local knowledge with expert knowledge from other disciplines, and next to the intention for a final product, they pay great attention to the process. They put effort in framing their inquisitive activism in methodological frameworks, and make time for sharing their findings in academic settings, such as the symposium this paper is reporting on, thus expanding their audience. For them, all of these steps, from concept over action to dissemination, critique and feedback, are part

39   With the Infinite Places exhibition at the Biennale of 2018, Encore Heureux Architects has introduced the notion of "Infinite Places" which evokes all the possibilities left open by those who make these places exist. See exhibition catalogue of the French Pavilion of the 2018's Venice International Architecture Biennale, Infinite Places curated by Encore Heureux, "Infinite Places," ,accessed December 4, 2023, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/dd-lieuxinfinis-def-040518-en_1__cle04a553.pdf

40   Simone Kroll, Lucien Kroll, Ordre et désordres: une architecture habitée (Paris: éditions Sens & Tonka, 2015).

of architecture as a dynamic discipline and hence at the roots of the mandate that goes with it.

Who is listening?

Many of the contributors to the symposium delivered a post-reflection on how they, as architects, have been thinking and positioning themselves through the design and building process. Retracing how they went beyond the mandate then implies also communicating to a public with hindsight on the process of designing, realising or maintaining a building. In the context of the symposium "Beyond the mandate," architects were scientifically reporting about their research in and through professional practice. When communicating on this "research in practice" one imagines and chooses an audience – a community of people who are assumed to be interested.

The papers collected in this issue address an audience not only of academics who are active in the discipline of architecture, but also their peers - architects working in the same professional field - and more generally, people interested in the same question, persons who potentially want to be involved in the conversation. And while an audience is expected to listen, the audience is also whom the speaker wants to listen to and enter into conversation with. In creating a conversation, one creates a new audience. On the topic "beyond the mandate", this conversation, as pointed out earlier, was to a large extent to be created.

All architects need to speak the language of multiple

audiences: of the client, of architectural discourse, of engineers and everybody involved in the project, of future users and of society at large. A project starts with listening, with giving attention, recognition, understanding and only then of finding a response. But, as many of the papers report about commitments beyond the mandate, an expanded conversation comes into view – one that is about how architecture speaks to an inclusive society, to the city in all its history and to our environment. The conversation is therefore also inherently extra-disciplinary. The architect mandates himself to commit to these causes, but on the other hand these causes are shared with society. Somehow all architects are to be engaged socially, environmentally, historically and to take part in the widely ramified discourse on architecture.

If the practitioner should take all these dimensions into account, are the stories told here more profound engagements in one of these dimensions? Are they a way of telling a story that is to be heard? Are they a way to profile a practice and take a position in a subfield, even of identity-building in a competitive market of architecture and research? Is the architect to define priorities for each project differently, to stake out what is worth doing beyond the mandate for this project?

Through the publication of their papers, the involved practitioners are stepping beyond the mandate of the architect, they enter grounds of academia, thus tying academic research to professional practice and vice versa, and nourishing architectural culture at large. Together these papers gravitate around a new middle ground or symbiosis of intersecting

audiences, tying together the professional, academic and cultural spheres. As publishing research is about translating knowledge to make it debatable and share it with a larger public or audience, one of the challenges of the papers presented here is to not only address an academic audience but also a wider culture. As such, the move from "research in practice" to publishing this research as academic knowledge poses the question if this move restricts its audience, or is rather a way of enlarging an audience or creating a new one. Beyond the format of academic conversations, one clue to this question seems to lie in the multiple formats of conversation evoked in the papers. The activities documented in the papers testify of interactions with an audience in different manners, from text to drawings, from images to movies, from close dialogues with collaborators, to conversations with imaginary clients, to social engagement through narrative structures set up with residents, dialogues with the city administration, to co-creation or considering a conversation as what the building is able to communicate with the city over time.

Conclusion: shifting the beyond within

The "variability of the mandate" is linked to the unpredictable nature of working in complex contexts and the architect's aspiration to make the most out of every situation. Going beyond the mandate is a continuing negotiation between the "beyond" and the "what is in" the mandate and its deliverables, and, as such integrating the "beyond" within it. Yet, choosing

the right mandate might be in quite a number of cases, to refuse the mandate, as they don't allow you to go beyond it. Some commissions do not allow for taking up the mandate properly.

As the mandate of an architect includes a societal accountability that transcends the mere interests of the commissioner, and as society is in constant evolution, the mandate constantly evolves. It responds to shifting insights about how to cope with, or respond to those societal evolutions. The annoyance to uncritically execute "what someone has decided decades ago", to quote Burch, Junghanss , and Ryffel, and consequently "claim the right to develop alternatives" refers to a conviction that a commission inherently is obsolete, inescapably reproducing the status quo.[41] While a commission thus might inherently be obsolete, rooted in the past, the mandate is also inherently rearticulating itself and adapting to changing circumstances. To look at architecture as a component of societal and environmental transition rather than (solely) in terms of the buildings it delivers, is not to dismiss architecture as a design discipline in itself. On the contrary, it brings the specific views, entries and speculations that the discipline is able to provide, into the heart of the ongoing debate and the continuing process of looking, evaluating, questioning, inquiring, pondering, valuing, deciding, caring and giving shape to our built environment. Such ongoing inquiry implies research. The practices that are discussed here convincingly witness of the privileged conditions that professional practice provides for effectively conducting such research.

The message for architectural education, which basically

---

41   Burch, Junghanss, and Ryffel (8000.agency), "No Clue - Clues," 70.

is a design-driven education, is to retain from conceptions of architectural design as mere application of technical knowledge and aesthetics, or as a preparation for professional behaviour in terms of a predefined set of learning outcomes, but to acknowledge it as both a place of personal development and a place of common debate and negotiation about what ought to be done/designed, aware of the cultural context one is operating in. As mentioned above, it is not a surprise to notice that the main body of the research cases that have been discussed here, is situated in professional practice, not in academia. Indeed, to the extent that inquisitive practitioners are to be considered as "reporters from the front", it must be said that with regards to the topic of interest - the mandate of the architect - the "front" is situated in professional practice. In order to keep pace with the fast transitions we are in, there is an important role for academia for developing solid and robust ways for securing the input of such inquisitive practitioners, as research-active professionals, into architectural education, to stimulate their work, and help them in the development of their research methodologies.

The message for commissioners is to acknowledge that they, when commissioning an architect to undertake a project, authorise a creative critical citizen to take up a responsible role towards achieving a desirable future, which might contain other acts and practices, and have other implications than foreseen. For them, this distinction between mandate and commission, can be useful in the way to understand how the client considers the mission he entrusts to the architect. But here, legal frameworks under which both

actors, commissioners and architects operate, come into play. In a country like Belgium hiring an architect is mandatory, whereas in the United States for example, hiring an architect is a voluntary choice without any obligation. In the first case, the client expects a signature and a ten-year insurance and the architect feels indebted to the client for having chosen him; in the second case, the client expects a work of art, and the architect gets a real mandate with the trust of the client. In these contrasting constellations, the contract involves different obligations and another degree of freedom for the architect to develop side ideas.

In the context of this colloquium, what was discussed as being "beyond the mandate" was only considered from the architect's perspective. However, the people with whom the architect collaborates can also go beyond their mandate, or be stimulated to do so. Beginning with the client or contracting authority. In the case of a private commission, the client might have an agenda, which goes beyond simple construction. In the case of a public commission, however, a societal and cultural dimension is at stake. Its funds being public, this public power has an obligation to meet expectations of society, to account for their decisions to future generations, but also to contribute to the cultural production financed largely by the public sector The building contractor can also carry out the project beyond his or her mandate. The construction site can be a space of freedom and exploration in the making of the project. What is "beyond the mandate of the architect" is not located in a single mind, with a hidden agenda, but can be found through collaboration between parties involved in the same project.

Bibliography

ACE (Architect's Council of Europe), "Practices of the Profession." ACE Architect's Council of Europe, accessed December 4, 2023, https://www.ace-cae.eu/practice-of-the-profession.

Bouilhol, Pierre and Agrippa Leenhardt (ANMA), "Uncertain Soils in Experimentation. Architects and Scientists Representing the Plural Values of Soils," Practices in Research #04 (December 2023): 77-103.

Burch,Oliver, Jakob Junghanss, and Lukas Ryffel (8000.agency), "No Clue - Clues. Working with the Morelli method", Practices in Research #04 (December 2023), 57-75.

Damsin, Stéphane, and Jan Haerens ,"Teatro, lo Tuyo es Puro Teatro" Practices in Research, practice-based research seminar, Beyond the Mandate, (March 2023): 129-137, accessed December 4, 2023.

Dewachter, Lillian. Luc Deleu & T.O.P. Office 1967-1991. Antwerpen: Muhka, 1991.

Dictionary, Oxford English. "Architecture, N.". Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/10408?rskey=Mk6vjN&result=1.

Di Leo, Benedetta, and Maddalena Ferretti, "Making Things. Practicing co-creation in the marginal territories of central Apennine," Practices in Research #04 (December2023): 105-129.

Encore Heureux, Infinite Places, exhibition catalogue of the French Pavilion of the 2018's Venice International Architecture Biennale, accessed December 4, 2023, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/dd-lieuxinfinis-def-040518-en_1__cle04a553.pdf.

Farrell, Yvonne, and Shelley McNamara, Biennale architettura 2018, 16th International Architecture Exhibition, brochure, accessed December 4, 2023, https://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/2018.

Geldhof, Charlotte, and Nel Janssens. "Van Ontwerpmatig Denken Naar Onderzoek." In Achtergrond 03 - Architect / Ontwerper / Onderzoeker? Casus Mare Meum: Een Oefening Op Zee Antwerp: VAI, 2007.

Hurx, Merlijn. Architect En Aannemer. De Opkomst Van De Bouwmarkt in De Nederlanden 1350-1530. Nijmegen en 's-Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2012.

IPCC, Climate Change 2007: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, (Cambridge University Press (2007)

Kulesza, Michal and Tomasz Swietlik, "Ruination Design." Practices in Research #04 (December 2023): 131-171.

Lemmens, Pieter, Vincent Blok, and Jochem Zwier. "Toward a Terrestrial Turn in Philosophy of Technology." Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology 21, no. 2/3 (2017): 114-26.

National Council of the Order of Architects, Code of Professional Conduct and Practice, of 16

December 1983 (BOJ, 8 May 1985).

Nijs, Lieven (BLAF), "Big Brick Hybrids. Learning by building beyond the mandate," Practices in Research #04 (December 2023): 173-202.

Nowotny, Helga. The Cunning of Uncertainty. Malden, MA: Polity, 2015.

Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 20 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. Continually updated at http://www.oed.com/.

Simons, Maarten. "'Education through Research' at European Universities: Notes on the Orientation of Academic Research." Article. Journal of Philosophy of Education 40, no. 1 (2006): 31-50. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2006.00493.x.

Till, Jeremy. "Three Myths and One Model." Building Material, no. 17 (2008): 4-10.

Yaneva, Albena. Mapping Controversies in Architecture. Burlington: Ashgate Pub. Co., 2012.

In Practice
interuniversity research group
of practising architects

KU LEUVEN   LIÈGE université   Universiteit Antwerpen   UCLouvain   ULB UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES