

REVIVE MEMORY

THROUGH DISPLACEMENT, SLOWNESS AND REPETITION
REFLECTION

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How do we enter and leave the landscape? February 2022.

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Reflection
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A starting point for a reflective practice

Today I start to finish this graduation project. From day one I challenged myself to focus on what seemed to be neglected in my studies. I wanted to explore Dutch landscapes. I wanted to wander into the fields. In the other studios I joined, there was a strong focus on the urban responsibility of architects. Thus, *Revive Memory* pleads for an alternative perspective on architectural production outside the urban realm in the Netherlands. I started working on a vague critique towards the appropriation and working method of architects outside the Dutch urban settlement. This section gives insight in how I evaluate the applied research method and I raise some new questions for future research. At the end I will add a personal note on the process as a whole.

Research & design

At the start I created a theoretical framework, I had the feeling that my knowledge about what theories had been developed around the concepts of landscape and memory. Unintentionally, this resulted in an important question how the two are related. I have been struggling with what theories I should discuss. Since the concepts of landscape and memory are both rather ambiguous in definition and application, I thought it was useful to address these ideas in a short section. From here the core research was developed. This was split up in two parts: first, an observation-based research method focused on how (my personal) memory works into the realm of landscapes outside the urban realm. And, the second part used an experimental based research method which was executed by expeditions to the Groninger Reitdiep area. To stress these research methods, I would like to get back to the writing and photography I used during my Explore Lab entry about a visit to the Groninger landscape in 2018. Together with my dad I visited different villages in the earthquake region. We talked with local villagers and became furious about the demolition of buildings, not one but complete villages were about to be destroyed. My dad indicated the village Zeerijp as: “An empty state in an abandon landscape”. The terms “empty” and “abandon” indicate that there was “full” and “presence”. In 2018, I was observing the abandon landscape while experimenting with poetic notations and photography. Throughout the physical interaction with landscape and its inhabitants a balanced, but biased, understanding came to light. To get back to this project, I think it was worth to combine the two research methods in this order. Now, I had been able to concentrate about what meaning was embedded in the memories of journeys throughout the Netherlands. The consecutive experiment took a lot of effort with traveling, appointments with locals and archives, but after all allowed me to qualify my subjective intentions upon a network of individuals and agencies, rooted in the Groninger Reitdiep area.

In short, I am relieved that my intended twofold research method worked out gently. This project originated from a personal, vulnerable perspective which was being subjected by other, critical perspectives inside and outside the faculty. I think that architects lack a degree of sensitivity in the appropriation of landscapes outside the urban settlement. Executing the suggested methods, I found it exciting to meet other people who used different words for feelings, ideas, fears, frustrations or questions as I created about similar events. When the process

Leegte in het Hogeland

Op een koude, grijze maandagochtend reden we over smalle wegen met sompige bermen. Ik gidste mijn zoon over het Hogeland. Hij had op Marktplaats een schoolwandkaart gekocht, in Uithuizen. Europa, 1957, toen Wolters het nog zonder Noordhoff deed en niemand iets wist van aardgas.

De twee meter brede kaart was voor zijn nieuwe kamer. Vanaf zijn Deense studieplek had hij geregeld dat hij bij terugkomst zou doorschuiven in zijn studentenhuus. Zijn moeder haalde hem op uit Denemarken. Achter de auto vol verhuisdozen en kledingtassen, hing zijn fiets. In Groningen stond zijn verdere huisraad: boeken, cd's, geluidsapparatuur, groene planten en een Perzisch tapijtje. Genoeg voor een volle auto en aanhanger.

Midden in het aardbevingsgebied, nabij Bedum, bekeken wij een boerderij uit 1854. Vanaf de ooit groene schuurdeur, liep een diepe scheur, als een litteken in een gezicht. Dichtgetimmerde ramen. Een dak vol gaten. De nok doorgezakt. In de overwoekerde tuin fotografeerden we bakstenen tussen net ontloken krokusjes. Over de spoorwegovergang - onbewaakt omdat het leven hier verdwenen is - wees ik mijn zoon op bomen en struiken die ooit een boerderij uit de wind hielden. De bevingen maakten de plek onbewoonbaar. De NAM kocht de boerderij op en veegde het van de kaart.

Een lege plaats in een verlaten landschap.

In 't Zandt herstelden stratenmakers met klinkertjes de rijweg. De nieuwbakken stenen staken scherp af tegen de kloostermoppen van de romaanse kerk. Honderd meter verderop bekeken we bij een verlaten, gele graafmachine een huis. Een karakteristieke woning op stand, uit 1903, voor een dokter of een rentenier. Boven de deur prijkte een sierlijk balkon. Ogenschijnlijk in goede staat. Toch waren hier vanochtend slopers opgedoken; buurtbewoners voorkwamen de sloop en riepen op tot herbezinning. Hoeveel kaalslag kan een dorp aan? We werden er stil en opstandig van.

In Uithuizen overviel ons de leegstand. Bevingen en bevolkingskrimp trekken een onzure wissel op de toekomst.

Niemand in 1957 had dit kunnen bevroeden.

developed, I used this excitement into the design process in thinking in rituals of entering, inhabiting and leaving the building. Doing so, the research method informed the design process implicitly as well.

Architectural form

What is it that an intimate relationship between architect and landscape can lead to architectural form? And, what instruments can translate embodied experience into architectural form? The developed keywords which inform an alternative attitude: repetition, slowness and displacement can be transferred among the discourse. Still, embodied experience needs more than only going to the landscape and applying walking as tool. The landscape should be explored with both traditional and sensory analysis methods. But what other, extreme forms can be added? As stated before, not only the architect is interested in the formation of landscapes and how landscapes are being lived. Creative disciplines – writers, photographers or artists – and scientific disciplines – biologists, geologists, historians – study the landscape as well. The conducted characteristics of the landscape in the Reitdiep area allow a designer to combine sensory information with factual information. In more elaborated projects – in comparison with this graduation project – these characteristics allow a multidisciplinary team to communicate coherently and significantly.

Throughout this research I developed tools and artefacts which balanced between convention and experiment. Drawing devices, 1:1 to 1:10 mock-ups and big size models: all had a versatile character which allow me to meander between realities and imaginative scenarios.

Reflecting on these actions, I doubt where architectural form starts? When do we produce architecture? In the prologue I formulated that landscape is “constructed” when humankind comes into place. Architectural forms in that landscape starts when we are formulating ideas upon that landscape. Intellectual, creative or practical ideas meet the physicality and sensory experience in the field: being there and returning there might already be an architectural performance. When inverting this idea: it is important to think how to bring the landscape back into the “abstract” studio space. The use of ordinary means with odd aspects creates a different understanding of the place and consequently institutes a (first) architectural form. For example, I created a portable drawing device from conventional architectural “A” horses. I carried this along during my walks and stopped at specific moments in the landscape to orient, to draw and to document this experiment. I learned from this that producing performances opens up insights to act different than I used to. This means that I come closer to the sensory aspects of specific aspects in the landscape.

Design

The composed design brief was a direct result of the experimental research in the Groninger Reitdiep area. The constant physical displacement of myself to the area lead to a deep understanding – from a designer perspective – what potentials and challenges could be discovered in the design project. Three principal decisions lead to the formulation of the design brief. First of all, I wanted to discover the potential of a new building which dwells upon the idea of a new typology in rural areas. I was looking for forgotten or undiscovered typologies which



Drying of drawings in front of in:dépendance at Furkapass, Realp, Switzerland, August 2022.

could be from value for this region. The design of the building I add to the landscape has very much to do with the visible and invisible layers of the landscape. The landscape design in the Allersmapolder engages with environmental challenges combined with the ongoing political discussion in the Netherlands about the relation between urban realm and rural areas. The recent developments with farmer strikes are just a tip of the iceberg, both in historical terms as in everyday business. The need for a space in a landscape outside the city felt as a necessity. Here, I could express the sensory experiences of being in the landscape gently. During the design process I found it important to reformulate what was valuable for designing a new building. Nowadays, you could doubt economic growth. Since climate change is challenges designers to think in scenarios, it is worth to let economic growth be less important. I think the landscape embassy I propose is not only for human activity but also for the natural elements like wind, water and earth. Sheep or cows can enter the building as well and birds can hide under the big roof. Thus, the significance of the design lies in the combination of sensory experiences, environmental challenges and political dynamics instability.

The discipline of architecture in the Netherlands can learn from other countries to shift its focus on the rural areas as well. I would like to give to examples of initiatives which I feel familiar with my graduation project. First of all, in the beginning of 2022, the Flemish Government Architect (Vlaamsbouwmeester) opened the exhibition Village Matters (Dorpelijkheid). In this exhibition they discovered how the character and identity of villages can be remained or developed during expansion or population decline². The Flemish Government Architect Erik Wiërs invited a variety of professionals outside the architecture discourse to discuss and document this Flemish development. Secondly, I want to highlight a Danish conference organized by the Architecture School Aarhus. The conference, *Re-scaling the Rural*, set the goal to gather interdisciplinary scholars and creatives in Thy, at the west coast of Denmark, to discuss the urban perspective on rural areas³. The intense stay for four days where conventional paper presentations were combined with site visits and local interviews showcased the potential for these initiatives. I did not participate in these initiatives. From here, I was searching for a project which I could extrapolate my findings from the research. I was invited by the chair of Jan De Vylder to join their *In:dépendance* at the Furkapass in Switzerland⁴. The research project in Groningen, in a totally different landscape than in the Alpes, helped me to understand what I needed to work with and how I developed my tools. My residence at the Furkapass allowed me to test this developed method and mastered it. My stay at the Furka gave me insight in the validity of absence and presence of human activity.

Landscapes are different, not only in physical appearance but also in mental constructs: memory. This graduation project allows me to place this project in a bigger scope. I think that the Dutch landscapes near the North Sea are more connected with North Sea regions in Denmark than the Dutch province Limburg. Suggesting this, I reconcile with the idea that architects should rethink borders of landscapes. In the end, I suggest that architects must travel more often to these sceneries.



Me, placing the composed drawing device in front of the Furkablick Hotel. Video still by Julia Liedel

Personal note

When applying for a graduation studio I really had the feeling to find an extreme situation which challenged myself for a very last time. In the various graduation studios, the track of Architecture is offering, there is a strong focus on urban settlements, most often situated outside the Netherlands. I have the feeling that I succeed to find an alternative path. In first instance my Explore Lab proposal did not convince the application committee. However, when being accepted, it gave me concrete information what information was not clearly communicated. At the start of the graduation project in September 2021, I was eager to focus on intrinsic incentives. These first weeks gave me comfort and confidence to confront myself with a very open, explorative and extreme research method. The read literature was still in my head while wandering the Groninger landscape. Walking was not only perceiving the surrounded landscape, but also processing the intellectual concepts I encountered in literature.

After P2 I found it important to step out the project for a little while. I realised I missed information in the profound reading of the concept of memory. I took the time to reach out with professionals from other disciplines who have had a relation to the Reitdiep area. Together with Marjoleine de Vos, Lieke de Jong and Tom Tieman I walked the landscape. These interviews and sensory mappings informed the project on the threshold towards the design incentives: what is it, that the landscape needs? In short, I think this unplanned deviation was crucial in the calibration of the political motive of this project. This phase embraces the multiplicity reading of landscapes, the interdisciplinary daily practice while reaching out to others, outside the “safe” academic world within the faculty. Of course, other moments during this long graduation process could be highlighted. Though, I am confident that these decisions to step aside allow me in the future to do this again. The act of doing nothing (or less) allow me to do more and better afterwards.

1. Bosch, A.J. (2018) *Leegte in het Hogeland*. Westerkrant.
2. Vlaamsbouwmeester. (2021). *Tentoonstelling “Dorpelijkheid” in Atelier Bouwmester*. Retrieved from <https://www.vlaamsbouwmeester.be/nl/dorpelijkheid>.
3. Aarhus Arkitektskolen. (2022). *Re-scaling the Rural*. Retrieved from <https://aarch.dk/en/re-scaling-the-rural/>.
4. ETH Zürich. (2022). *Open call: in:dépendance. ETH Zürich*. Retrieved from <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/469120/open-call-in-dpendance/>.

