

What if we reimagine Architecture through an
Ecofeminist lens?
Appendix to the Research

Graduation project
Explore lab 40

E. V. Bos
48973548

Supervised by I. L. Martin, S. Milinovic and R. van den Ban

Table of Content

1. Problem statement	3
2. Conceptual Framework	4
3. Methodology	6
4. Ecofeminist framework	7
5. Imaginaries	
5.1 Radio Kootwijk	8
5.2 Public Toilet - Janskerkhof	9
5.3 Artis	10
5.4 Cartesius	11
6. Focussed imaginations	
6.1 Uncontrolled Zoo	12
6.2 Kootwijk disrupting tempo	13
6.3 Public SOILet	14
7. References	15

Problem statement

Around the globe we are seeing the increasing impact of humanity on our earth systems. Rising global temperatures, more frequent extreme weather events and an elevated extinction rates reveal the immense consequences of climate change (IPBES, 2019; IPCC, 2023). Induced by world-wide extractivism and exploitation, climate change is the direct effect of the western perception of nature as a resource (Klein, 2015). This perception is facilitated by the dichotomy western societies have created between human and nature. By placing ourselves outside of nature, nature has become a distant concept, an 'away' (Morton, 2009) rather than a system we are a part of. This in turn, allows us to turn nature into a resource in our capitalist system.

Architecture, as a cultural and spatial practice, plays a critical role in reinforcing this disconnection. In its modern Western form, architecture's main function seems to be to shelter humans from the unpredictability of natural systems, actively disconnecting us from the world around us.

Current actions taken to reduce the impact of climate change – such as the implementation of nature-based solutions- often fail to challenge these underlying systems. As these solutions are generally based in wester- ways of thinking, they continue to use nature as a resource focussing on its value only in terms of human benefit. As a results, these approaches remain superficial and insufficient; treating symptoms without addressing our fundamentally broken relationship with nature. Instead, what is needed are radically new ways of designing our cities, ways that redefine our relationship with our environment and facilitate new, interconnected ways of living.

This research explores ways to reimagine our architectural practice. It does so by looking at the current architectural practice in the Netherlands through and ecofeminist lens and using radical spatial imagination to explore new values and tools for nature connectedness. Results of this research will then function as the foundation for a design project that aims to challenge architecture's role in human-nature relationships in western societies.

Figure 1 shows how this is embodied in the research question.

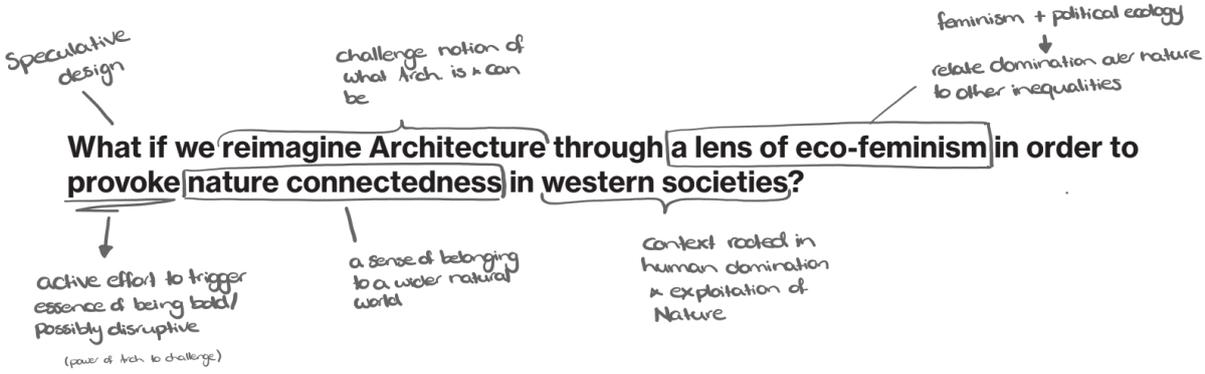


Figure 1: Research question - unpacked [own work]

Conceptual Framework

Ecofeminism

This project is grounded in ecofeminist theory, which integrates feminism and political ecology by critically connecting the exploitation of nature to wider political systems of oppression and domination. At its core, ecofeminism is centred around the human connection to nature and critique's western binary thinking that establishes a divide between nature and culture.

Similar to how rigid gender distinctions have historically justified the oppression of women, the nature/culture divide turns nature into an 'other', making it available as a resource to extract and control. Ecofeminists and other critical ecological thinkers argue that these dualisms are not just philosophical but actively shape realities (Morton, 2009). While some eco-feminist thinkers centre their work around this woman-nature analogy, I focus on the strands of ecofeminism that go beyond this and instead engage deeply with decolonial thinking and indigenous knowledge systems.

As focus is placed on notions of interconnectedness, interdependence and relationality, ecofeminist thought de-emphasizes human centrism in favour of multi-species collaboration (Haraway, 2016). This opens up space for different kinds of world-making and envisioning futures that are grounded in care and reciprocity.

Within this frame-work of ecofeminist values, I also explored and engaged with other ways of knowing. Many values central to ecofeminist thinking find resonance in, for example, indigenous practices, which have long centred reciprocal relationships with land, plants, animals, and ecosystems. Where ecofeminists are often still theorizing what it means to live interconnectedly, Indigenous cultures have practiced these principles for generations. Braiding these wisdoms of indigenous cultures into our westernized context is essential to this project.

Nature (dis)connectedness

Nature connectedness is a term found in the Western psychology, where it is described as "a sense of belonging to the wider natural world ... an appreciation and value for all life that transcends any objective use of nature for humanities purposes" (Lumber et al., 2017, p.3). Research has linked nature connectedness to pro-environmental behaviour (Mackay & Schmitt, 2019), and direct contact with natural environments has been shown to enhance this connection (Perkins, 2010).

However, with psychology being rooted in western ways of thinking, its approaches are often constrained by the very dualisms ecofeminism seeks to dismantle. Psychology tends to treat humans and nature as separate entities, and its methodologies are inherently anthropocentric, maintaining a hierarchical power relationship between humans and the rest of the living world. While these insights provide empirical grounding for the benefits of reconnection, they will not provide the most suitable framework to support arguments for a radically new way of connecting to the natural world.

Similar notions, however, can be found in other fields of knowledge. Donna Haraway, for example, talks about multi-species entanglements rather than human-nature relationships (Haraway, 2016). This framework challenges the nature-culture divide and simultaneously decentralizes humanity from the narrative, providing a more sustainable and inclusive model for imagining interconnected worlds.

Building on indigenous perspectives, Robin Kimmerer, extends this argument even further. Rather than speaking of 'connection' she talks about relationality (Kimmerer, 2020). By emphasizing reciprocity and gratitude towards the land, she portrays natural elements - such as plants and animals - as active participants in a shared world and highlights the value of appreciating gifts of nature and the importance in giving back. With this narrative, Kimmerer shifts the focus from human benefit or responsibility to mutual care.

Positionality

A fundamental principle in feminist research is positionality, which acknowledges the identity of researchers and practitioners as an active influence that inevitably shapes and affects the practice and the knowledge that emerges (Bourke, 2014).

Throughout this project, I have consistently situated myself by reflecting on and exposing my own positionality in a positionality journal. Acknowledging that my identity, background, and perspective inevitably influence every stage of the process— from the selection of information sources to their interpretations and the translations into design – facilitates critical reflection, for myself as well as others.

As positionality is a constantly evolving entity, it is important to recognize that mine has inevitably been reshaped by my readings as well as by my experiences and the acts of Radical Spatial Imagination.

The active engagement with my positionality underscores that this project represents a version of an interconnected future, not the version. Multiple, diverse perspectives are necessary to adequately reimagine and reconstruct our relationships with the natural world.

Methodology

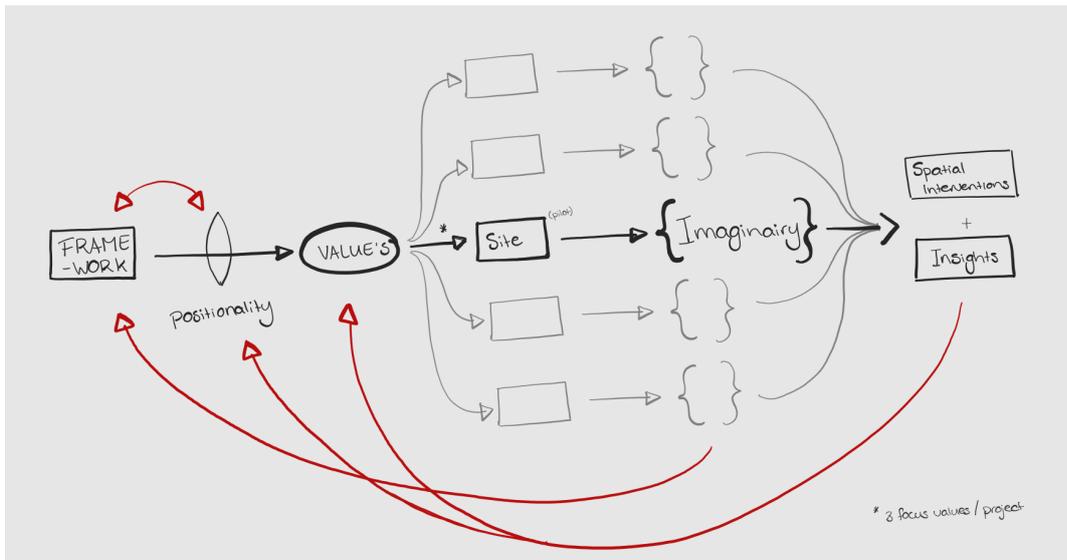


Figure 2: Research methodology [own work]

In this research I have collected knowledge and insights through Radical Spatial Imagination, a method of research by design centred around spatial justice (see figure 2). Which, in line with ecofeminist thinking, is a methodology grounded in notions of pluriversity. It consists of a range of different forms of knowledge collection as well as reflections which are connected through continuous feedback loops (see the red lines) resulting in an iterative and cyclical approach.

At the core of this research we find my ecofeminist framework, which should be understood as a dynamic and continuously evolving body of knowledge. It is established through extensive desk research and combines insights from literature reviews, lectures, workshops, symposia and conversations.

My positionality functioned as a lens through which I translated this ecofeminist framework into concrete value's. These value's I then used to guide my my Imaginaries.

The imaginaries form a space of exploration. Guided by 3-4 value's each, I reimagined 4 different sites in the Netherlands through my ecofeminist lens. By collecting my research, sketches, collages, speculative drawings and question on a 'murder mystery board', I was able think through these Imaginaries as they took shape and use the act of design as a tool in my research.

The various imaginaries build upon each other as the constant iterative process allowed for the theoretical framework and my positionality to learn and adapt off of the imaginaries, re-shaping the values that were distilled. Additionally, the constant engagement with this active process of spatial imagination has allowed me to extend the limits of my imagination throughout the course of this research, allowing new and different spatial imaginations to unfold.

The final product of this research consists not of definite conclusions, but rather of an array of possible spatial interventions (within the various imaginaries) and a set of 18 – neither conclusive nor exhaustive – insights for reimagining architecture through an ecofeminist lens.

Ecofeminist Framework

This board shows the current state (dec. 2025) of my ecofeminist framework. It includes a wide array of resources that range from experiences (such as my mycelium growing workshop), to symposia, articles, books and private conversations. The coloured lines on the board represent different thematics and value's that have been used to shape and guide my four Imaginaries.

This frame-work has continuously evolved throughout my project and will continue to evolve and change for probably most of my life, or at least as long as I keep engaging, learning and growing with eco-feminist theory and practice.

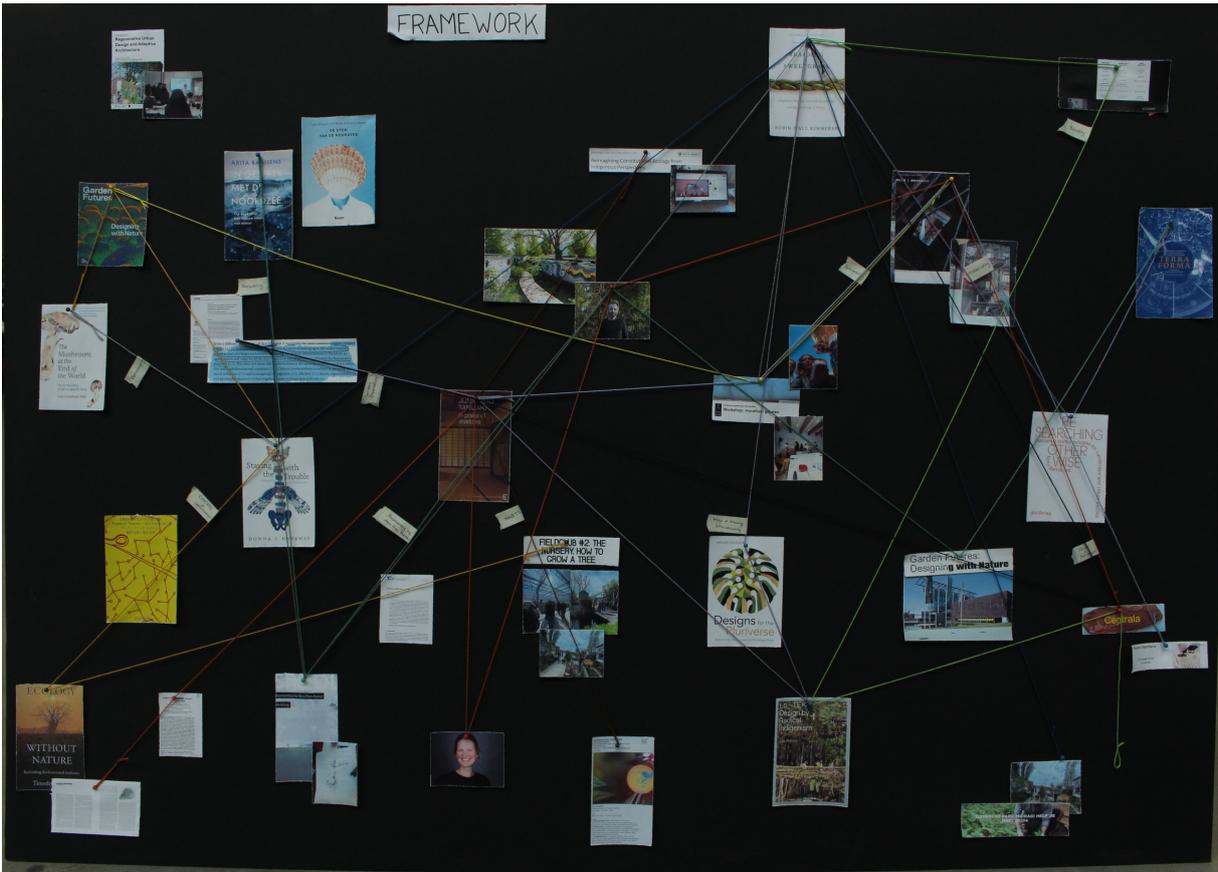


Figure 3: Ecofeminist framework board [own work] - see the next page for a larger image

Imaginary - Radio Kootwijk

Radio Kootwijk is a historic radio-transmitting station in the middle of the Veluwe. I selected this site because the massive concrete construction seems alien and completely disengaged with its natural landscape and surroundings. The values for this reimagination were: *Pausing, Positive Human world-making abilities and Living building (temporality & change)*

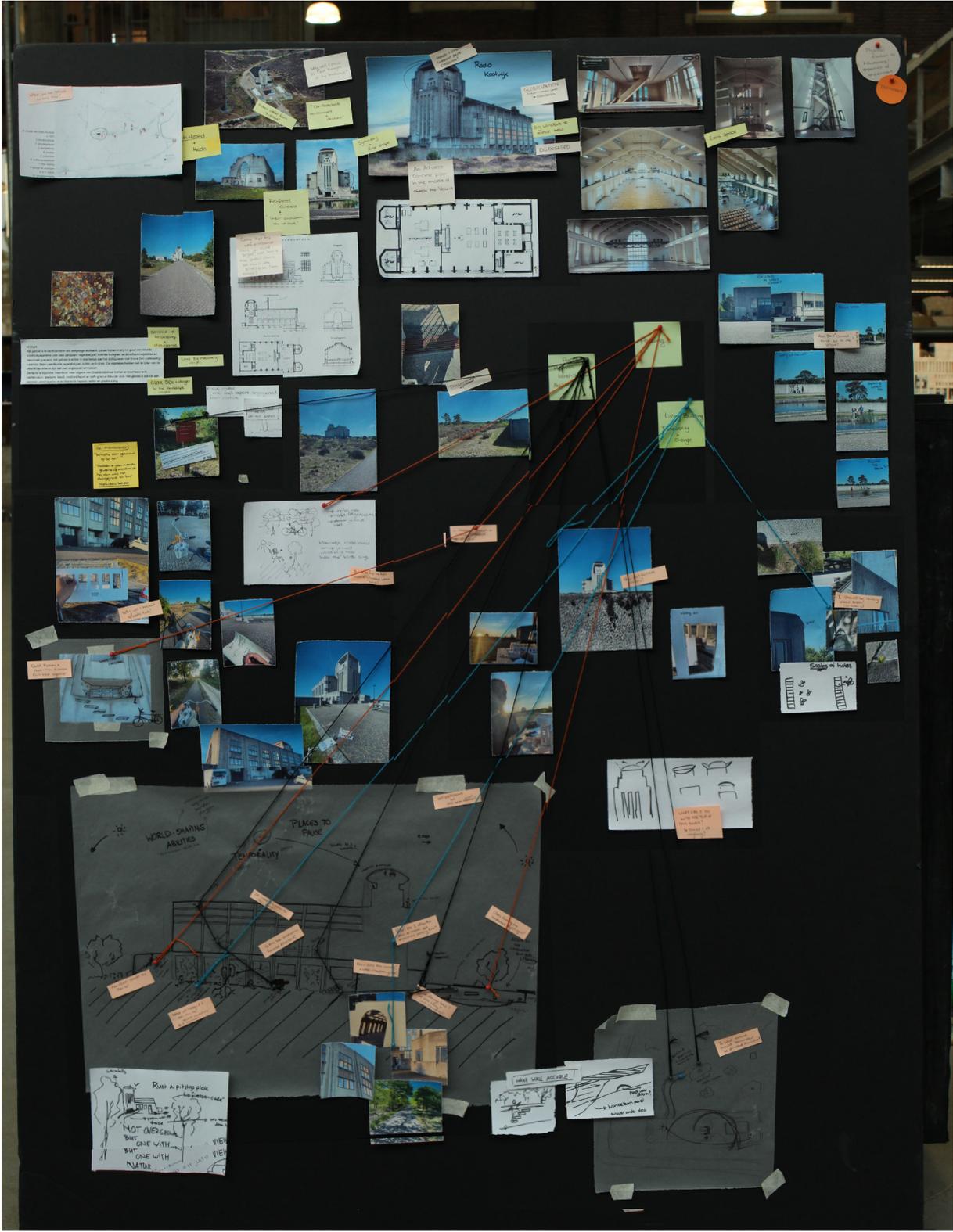


Figure 4: Murder Mystery board Radio Kootwijk [own work]

Imaginary - Public Toilet, Janskerkhof

The public toilet at Janskerkhof in Utrecht resembles the general architecture of public toilets around the country. While pooping is inherently a very natural activity, the architecture of our 'pooping spaces' (this claustrophobic iron cage) completely decouples us from our environment. The values for this reimagination were: *Materiality, Locality and Reciprocity.*

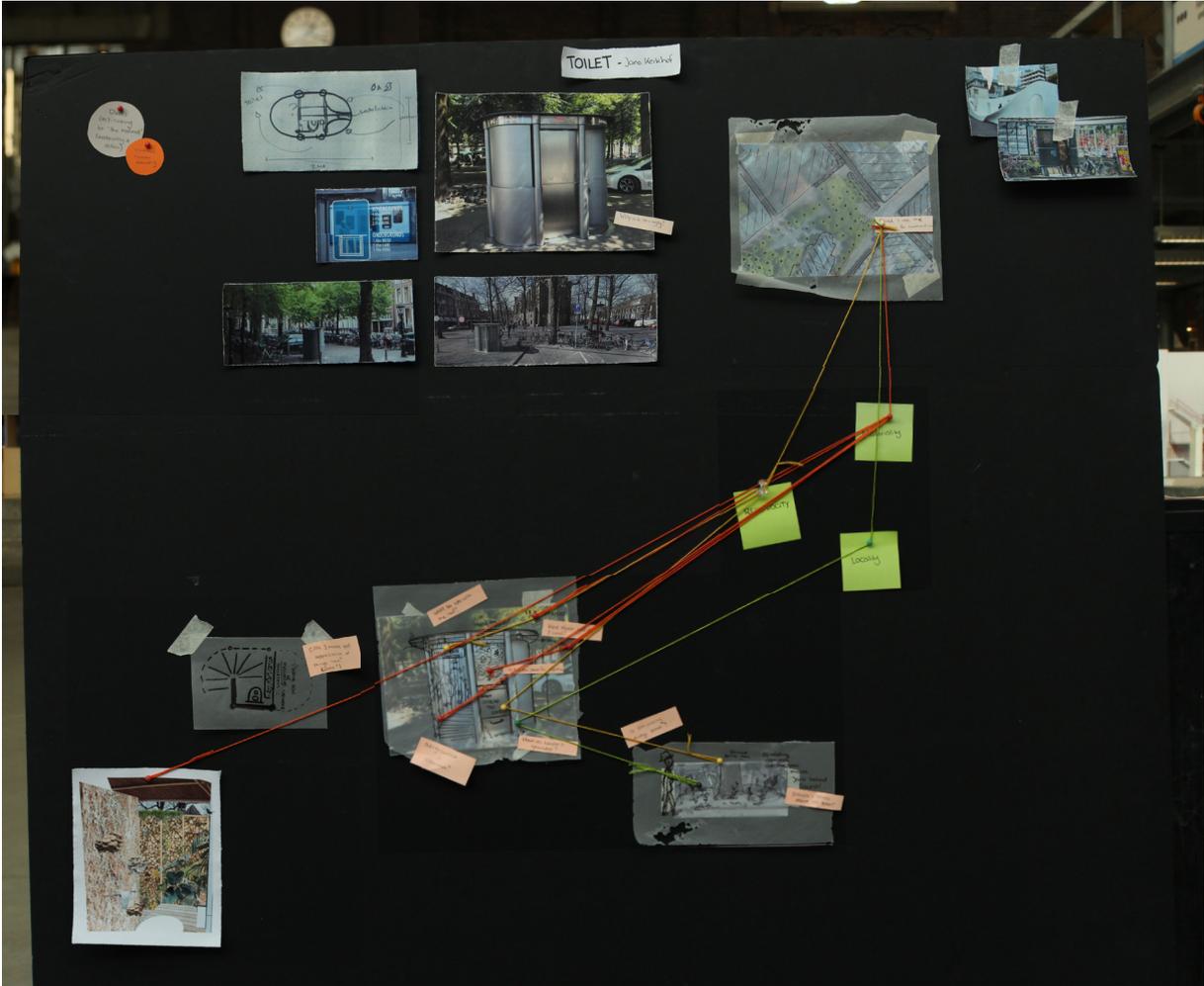


Figure 5: Murder Mystery board Public toilet [own work]

Imaginary - Artis

Artis is the oldest public zoo in the Netherlands, build in 1838 as a space to increase knowledge on natural history its main function quickly became 'collecting exotic animals'. This imaginary moves more towards fundamental questioning on how we relate to nature and critique's the objectification of nature in zoo's. The values for this reimagination were: *Care, Locality, Relationality adn Other ways of learning/ knowing.*

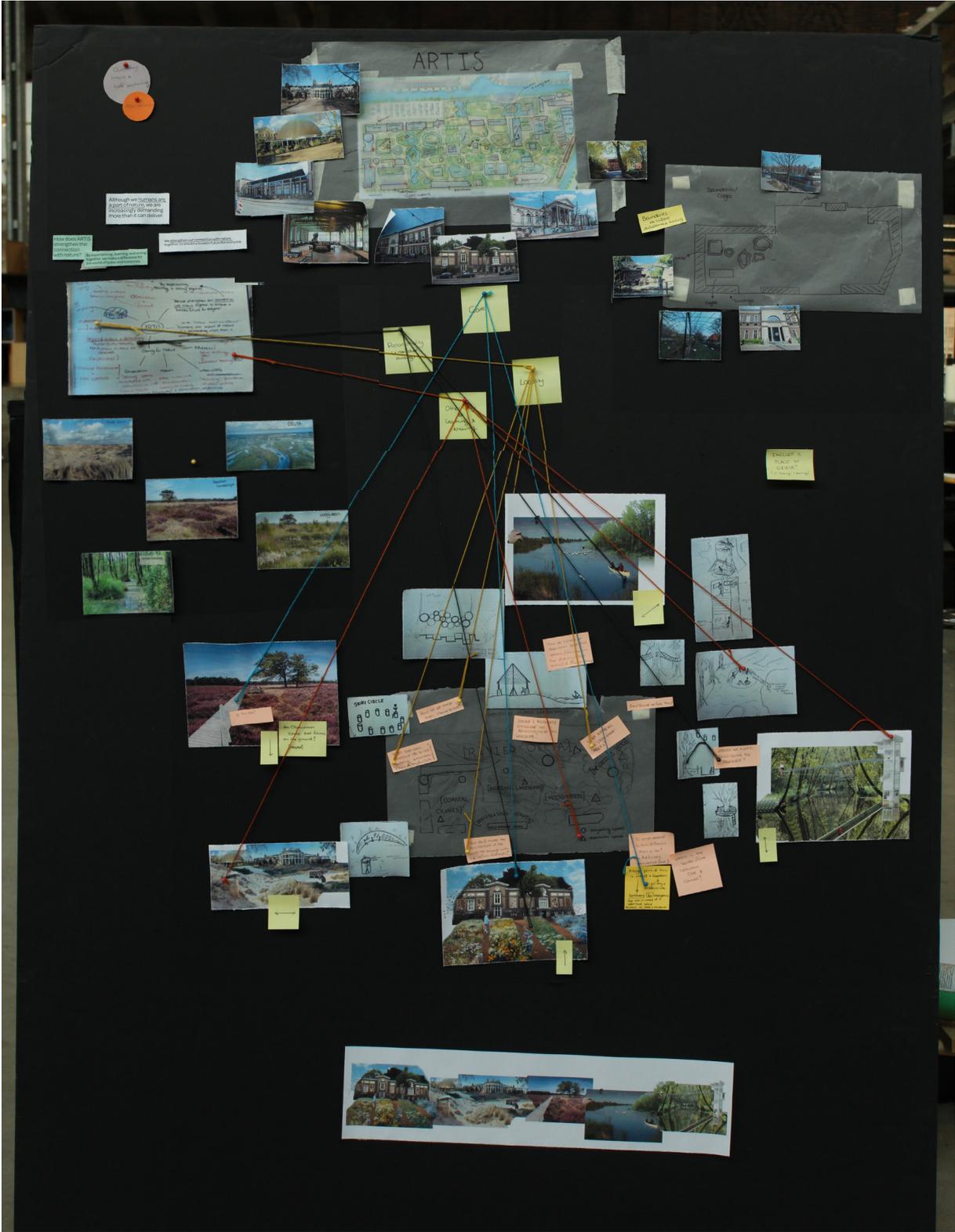


Figure 6: Murder Mystery board Artis [own work]

Imaginary - Cartesius

Cartesius is a new urban development centred around 'healthy and green living'. This development represents contemporary nature-based solutions that use nature as a tool; the reimagination aims to explore how the architecture would change if it was actually designed to fundamentally reconnect. The values for this reimagination were: *Sensory experiences, Temporality and Other ways of knowing.*



Figure 7: Murder Mystery board Cartesius [own work]

Focussed Imaginations

The focused imaginations are three explorations which I used to extend my research after gathering my insights. These studies revisit three of my imagination locations through the lens of one specific insight (see below). The goal of these studies was to really engage with what each insight challenges at its core, to push the radicality of my research even one step further and to explore the application of individual insights.

- Artis: *let go of control*
- Kootwijk: *disrupt tempo*
- Public toilet: *work with/from/for the soil*

An Uncontrolled Zoo

In the uncontrolled zoo I explored an Artis where animals are simply free to go where they want. While I was thinking along elephant migrations through Amsterdam, I also realised that once human presence is removed from animals' sight, Artis itself might actually be the most appealing habitat for a lot of more-than-human life.

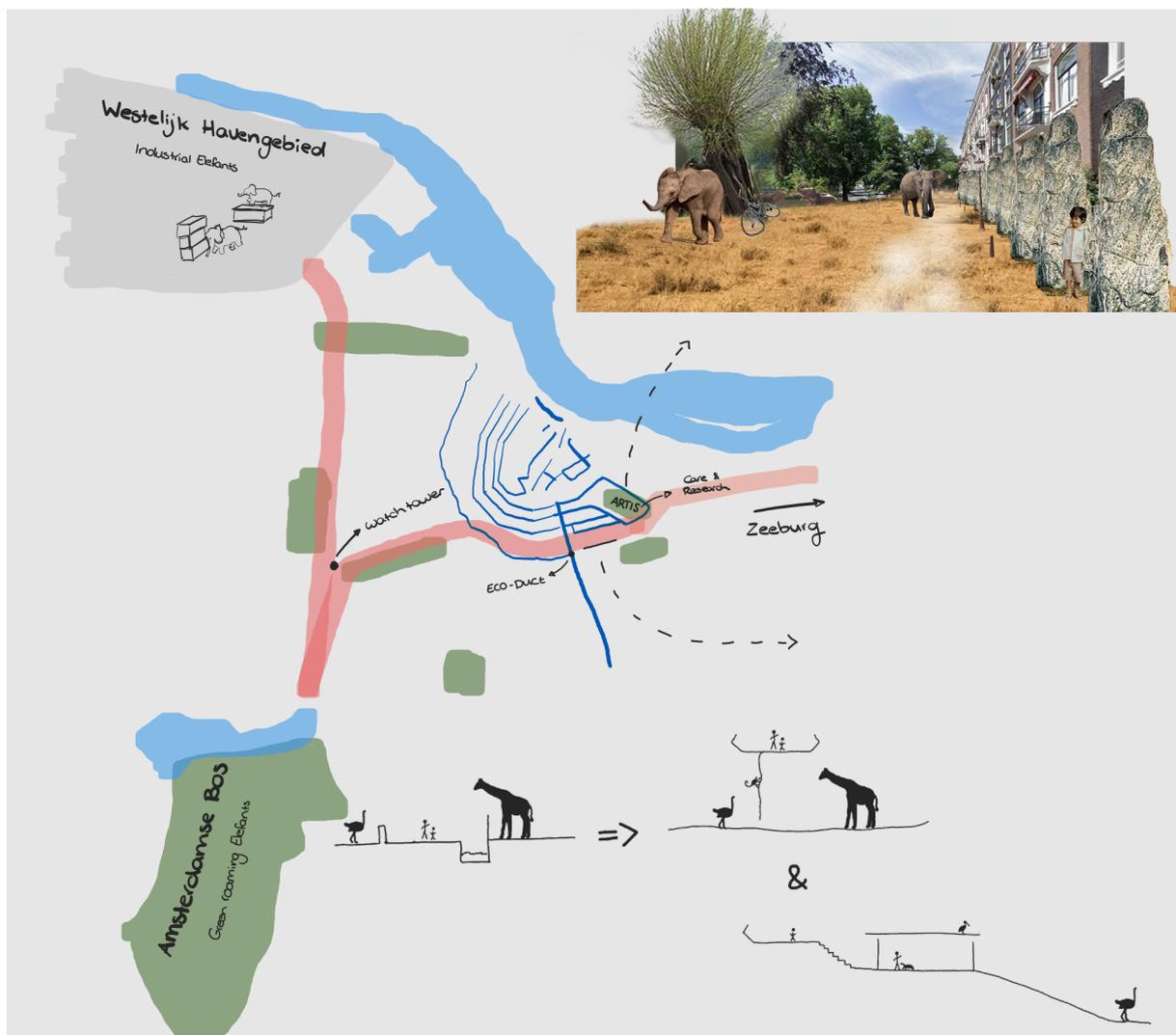


Figure 8: Collage and Drawings of the Uncontrolled Zoo [own work]

Kootwijk Disrupting Tempo

At Kootwijk disrupting tempo, everything is designed to disrupt the tempo of cyclists usually racing over the Veluwe. It is no longer possible to cycle around the building, which forces everyone to go through. On this route they are continuously physically slowed down or tempted to stop.

The stairs and zigzag paths decrease tempo by force, while simultaneously directing attention to the environment; the comfort of the courtyard remains (although now shared with the natural environment), and sitting stairs are introduced at the end of the building, where temptation to slow down is increased with the introduction of a coffee bar.



Figure 9: Collages and Drawings of Kootwijk Disrupting Tempo [own work]

A public SOILet

Thinking through soil at the site of the public toilet meant thinking through human waste as compost. In order to ensure that this waste is distributed over the site effectively and not piling up in one place, the toilet is hung from a cable car construction that moves over the whole square. Making flowers bloom where poops are flying!



Figure 10: Collages and Drawings of the public SOILet [own work]

Full reference list

- Ait-Touati, F., Arenes, A., & Gregoire, A. (2022). *Terra forma: A Book of Speculative Maps*. National Geographic Books.
- Baaijens, A. (2025). *In gesprek met de Noordzee: op zoek naar een nieuwe relatie met de natuur*. Atlas Contact.
- Bathla, N. (2024). *Researching otherwise: Pluriversal Methodologies for Landscape and Urban Studies*. Verlag.
- Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(33), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1026>
- Burgers, L., Meijer E., & Nowak, E. (2020). *De stem van de Noordzee: een pleidooi voor vloeibaar denken*. Boom.
- Escobar, A. (2018). *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Duke University Press.
- Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
- IPBES. (2019). *Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6417333>
- IPCC. (2023). *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (p. 184). IPCC. <https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647>
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2020). *Braiding Sweetgrass. Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- Klein, N. (2015). *This Changes Everything*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- Lumber, R., Richardson, M., & Sheffield, D. (2017). Beyond knowing nature: Contact, emotion, compassion, meaning, and beauty are pathways to nature connection. *PLOS ONE*, 12(5), e0177186. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177186>
- Mackay, C. M. L., & Schmitt, M. T. (2019). Do people who feel connected to nature do more to protect it? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 65, 101323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2019.101323>
- Mithal, S., & Gajjar, A. (2025). *Living together: More-Than-Human Ecologies for Architectural Thinking*. Birkhauser.
- Morton, T. (2009). *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Harvard university press.
- Morton, T. (2012). *Architecture without Nature [Essay]*. Academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/2064219/Architecture_without_Nature
- Nousaku, & Tsuneyama, M. (2024). *Urban Wild Ecology*. Toto.
- Nousaku, F. (2021). *Edifice of the wild* (Contemporary Architect's Concept Series No. 29). INAX Publishing / LIXIL Publishing.
- Oskam, P. I., & Mota, J. A. (2020). Design in the Anthropocene: Intentions for the Unintentional. In *Springer series in design and innovation* (pp. 269–279). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-61671-7_26
- Perkins, H. E. (2010). Measuring love and care for nature. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(4), 455–463. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2010.05.004>
- Schon, V. R., & Celi, M. (2023). *Pursuing positionality in design*. <https://doi.org/10.21606/iasdr.2023.371>
- Stappmanns, V., & Kries, M. (2023). *Garden futures: Designing with Nature*. Vitra Design.
- Tanizaki, J. (2001). *In praise of shadows* (T. J. Harper, Vert.). Vintage Books. <https://doi.org/10.54632/21.4.IMPJ1> (Originally published in 1933)
- Tsing, A. (2015). *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*.
- Watson, J. (2019). *Lo-Tek. Design by Radical Indigenism*. TASCHEN.