

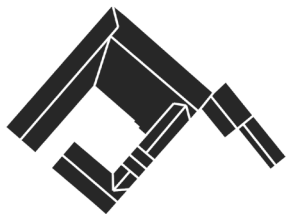
# Reflection

---

Msc4, Architectural Engineering

---

*I ain't gonna work on Maggie's farm no more*



*Student:*

*Aron Jansen*

*4480716*

*Tutors:*

*Annebregje Snijders*

*Paddy Tomesen*

*Nico Tillie*

## A fascination translated into design

Triggered by a personal fascination of the relation between the landscape and humans, I started to research the scope of regenerative ways to relate to our hinterland. What touched me is the deterioration of ecosystems and our unawareness of their value. This decline is maintained by complex (agricultural) production and processing systems. A similar unawareness or ignorance can be projected on our field of architecture where we tend to take available space and materials for granted.

Assuming there would be a way to design more integrally; with the existing landscape and existing actors in the landscape. To look at what it can offer us as designers, considering the well-being of our farmland's ecology and the people that live and work in it. Therefore the aim of the project is to rethink the farm as an actor on the frontline to fight deterioration of landscapes, both spatially and ecologically, and of potential regenerative solutions.

As architecture student I was interested specifically in the role architecture has in exploring the tension between a puristic, context-specific approach, with the use of natural resources and local building techniques, as opposed to sometimes having to use imported (unnatural) materials.

In addition, old materials can be assembled or treated with new techniques, which adds an innovative side to the project. Part of the design challenge was to be creative with the materials available from the immediate area. In addition, the challenge was to respond to the landscape in terms of form, and on top of that to show the ingredients of the land used in a new architectural language. Part of the process

was to become informed about the possibilities and applications of materials such as wood, loam and hemp and experiment with combining them in an innovative way.

## Research description

The farmhouse in Zuid-Limburg was the starting point for the research and the design; with the current farmer as source of inspiration for sustainable and local production systems. The farm itself inspires, by the layering of time, hundreds of years it has gone through and developed, visible in the messiness of the yard and the life around the farm. Additionally, the location being relatively un-Dutch made this an interesting case for the project. The research resulted in an overview of possible interventions that can be done to reduce waste flow and to improve the landscape's quality. One of the possible interventions being cultivation of building materials, which makes the connection with architecture. Less obvious and more subtle ways to integrate the research into the design are the correspondence with the landscape in, for example, shape and orientation.

## Project description

The design consists of two different interventions over time that relate to the landscape and agricultural production processes.

For the first intervention, a redesign of the old

farmhouse, the strategies were using minimal interventions and building on existing qualities. Locally opening up of walls and roofs give a new layer to the inward facing farmhouse focusing more on the landscape. The loam soil that is available in the area in combination with grown hemp are used for constructing two small homes and a workshop space within the old farmhouse. Over a time span of 20 years small trees that have been planted on the land are big enough to be cut down and used for construction. The second intervention uses the majority of the small timber. This intervention consists of a new barn that will be built in the middle of farmland and will facilitate the following new function of the farm besides the existing cultivation of potatoes; the growth of hemp and timber. The barn is also partly accessible to visitors and displays the use of natural grown materials and reacts in shape to the surrounding landscape by opening up or closing off. In addition to two design interventions, the final product consists of a phasing plan and a landscape design that focuses on raising awareness of the value of the landscape and the farmer as its protector.

## Design and process

During the process of designing the awareness of another way to look at architecture came about. With the simplicity of assembly and use and reuse of (natural) materials arose the challenge to find aesthetics and an architecture in the obvious; a “what you see is what you get”-architecture. To

combine this with my overall intuitive approach and everything I have learned in architecture, made me venture into new territory; a humble, simple design rooted in its context at all scales. For example, I imagined what the space/building is like from the perspective of a swallow, flying in there. Through sketches and models, I worked on the atmosphere of the space and the interaction between landscape and architecture.

Experiencing and falling in love with the location, the romantic scenery of Zuid-Limburg, was not the hardest part, mainly rationalizing towards a buildable design was challenging. Especially in combination with the tendency to want to explore all aspects very thoroughly. This led to weeks in which I was slow to make progress. In the end, I think I succeeded to reflect the experience of the landscape at all scales.

## Position

The architect needs the expertise, role and responsibility to reveal qualities of a certain location or material. This is also inherent to the manufacturing of the materials/building project, which as a process becomes visible, something for everyone to see. The architect needs a broad vision through all scales, to map out natural processes and through that create a consciousness about the first step towards an enriching of the attitude towards nature of the people in the Western world, where that connection has been lost (because of wealth). Looking at what the site has to offer, not: “what do we as

humans have to offer on this site”. This is what the site offers and that’s what you do with it. The experience of architecture on a certain location can be reached without undermining the qualities of the location. It can go together, something that today is often seen as two separate things; one excludes the other. Essentially, it is observing carefully as to what the location or place has to offer, whether it is a city or the rural.

Do we have to obtain wood from Sweden and metal from China? Or can cities at the riverside use clay to make brick? It is a pursuit of nuance in the paradigm, of our perception of sustainability. In which there is space for an informed exception, as a result of which, one can use steel.

As architect there is a striving for a ‘perfect’ image, while beauty and nuance also exists in the imperfections. This is often implied by the fact that architecture can not decay or deteriorate: ‘this is the image and this is how it should stay’.

Architecture does not have to be build once to be architecture, there is no building date. This attitude, of where we naturally assume availability of materials, developed. This serves a lazy approach and through this a certain insensitivity and distance regarding the location and availability of materials (like seasonal materials, rammed earth etc). Assuming that time (and nature) is (are) something that always continues, then when is a building really ‘finished’? As if the architect stands outside of time; without any influence from the environment. We have developed a hardened position towards nature as architects. There is no place for ecology

within the building; it is not a part of the whole. This way we start an unnatural process, by taking up space without consideration.

This graduation project shows that there exists another approach. The landscape can play a role together with architecture, to shape a new language by the use of non-architectural elements, (tree lines, fields, valleys etc.), as well as the use of materials (loam, hemp) and the design of the building which can correspond and have an interaction with the landscape. Literally invite nature inside the building. The building will live from the inside, the discrepancy between nature and the constructed fades as a result, with a heightened visibility and thus consciousness of the landscape.

In my opinion we do not have to think within restrictions, but start with seeing beauty and potential in what we have and bring that forward. That’s also one of the important things I learned during graduation. In a capitalist society where there is a tendency to assume that everything can be obtained just like that, there must be a call to uncover unsustainable conditioned processes in order for change to be initiated. It is not about a new way, or new clever solutions. It is about a different attitude towards architecture in general. How should one respond to the site, how should architecture react to a society engulfed by a culture of doctrines of insensitivity. It is about showing that it can be different, showing that architecture is not about delivering perfection or clean products, but something that transcends the present and may change and develop over time. It can be expanded, but also

given back to nature; a climax between nature and culture of which man is ultimately a product.

### Reflection on studio

The graduate studio in architectural engineering gives students the freedom to tackle problems within and at the edges of the field. The multitude of topics provide the opportunity to pioneer. The professors encourage this as well. The combination of research and design makes the project stand on a strong argument. It brought me a lot to investigate a new phenomenon in a new location with the few frameworks set by the studio and extract from it a design.



*Japanese tea house as example of simple and careful design*