

THE VOICE OF THE WATER

in search for the sublime in the Biesbosch

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Research:
The voice of the water

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1. Dooi, Wout Berger, 2017

Herrinering aan Holland

Denkend aan Holland

zie ik breede rivieren

traag door oneindig

laagland gaan,

rijen ondenkbaar

ijle populieren

als hoge pluimen

aan den einder staan;

en in de geweldige

ruimte verzonken

de boerderijen

verspreid door het land,

boomgroepen, dorpen,

geknotte torens,

kerken en olmen

in een grootsch verband.

de lucht hangt er laag

en de zon wordt er langzaam

in grijze veelkleurige

dampen gesmoord,

en in alle gewesten

wordt de stem van het water

met zijn eeuwige rampen

gevreesd en gehoord.

Memory of Holland

Thinking of Holland

I see wide rivers

slugging through

limitless low-lying land,

lines of implausibly

gauzy poplars

like feathered plumes

in far distances stand;

and sunken away

in the formidable vastness

the farmsteads

scattered are found,

tree clumps, villages,

pollarded steeples

churches and elms

in one great bound.

the sky hangs low there

and the sun slowly becomes

in grey colourful

damps blurred

and in all the regions

the voice of the water

with its eternal disasters

is dreaded and heard.

Herman Marsman, 1941

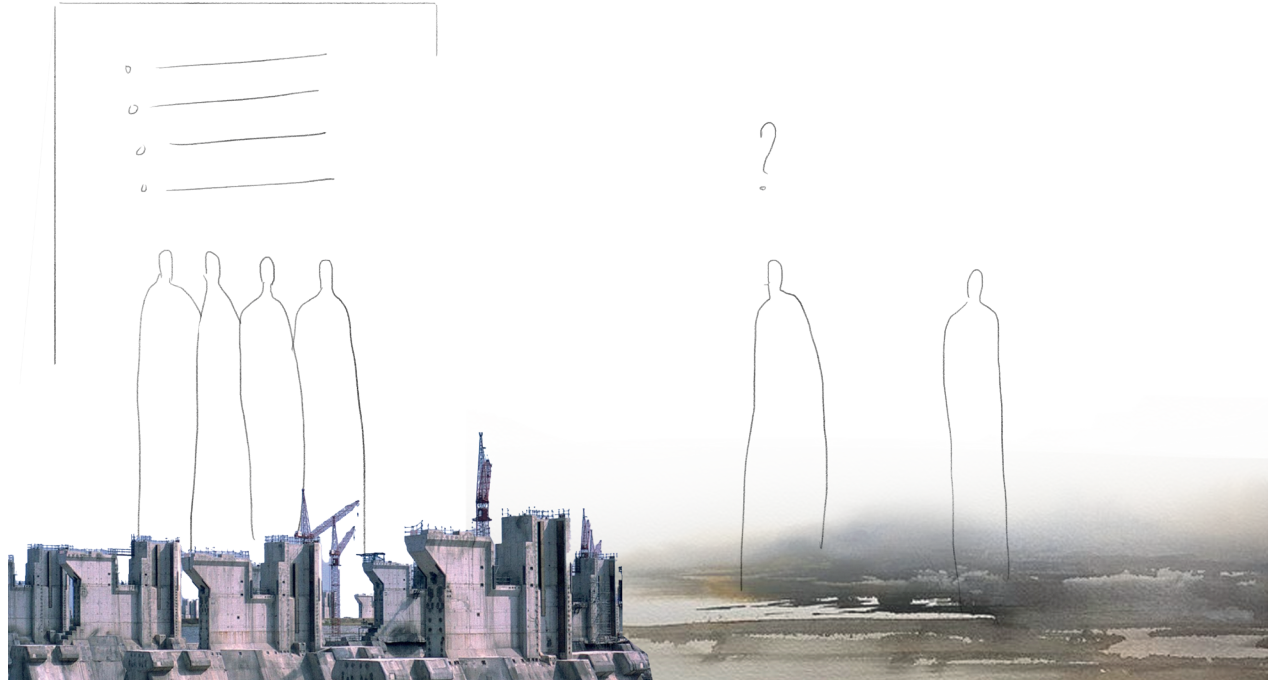
The voice of the water, felt and heard

Thinking of Holland, I see straight lines. Borders dividing one from another. I see endless green fields and nothing limiting my view. I have memories of trainrides gauzing away in the distance, forgetting time and place. Forgetting borders. Thinking of Holland I see water, a feeling of rest easing over me. The most beautiful reflections to dream away to. Memories of swimming and floating and diving and holding your breath. Feelings of another world. A lighter world.

Although water already has this quality of a sense of freedom, it is in fact very controlled. After endless battles with the water, the government of the Netherlands decided to end it once and for all by introducing the Deltawerken.

This research dives deeper into the Biesbosch, a place where water fought back and regained its strenght.





3. Lost in free waters

INTRODUCTION

Submerge, dissolve, transcend beyond

Water can transport us beyond the constraints of time and space. It has a mesmerizing effect on our thoughts, allowing us to enter a meditative state that heightens our awareness. I've always been captivated by water – I love swimming, particularly underwater. Beneath the surface, our entire perception of the world is transformed, transporting us to a realm that feels entirely separate from the profane. Our movements become more fluid, our vision is obscured, and our hearing is distorted, while our sense of smell is abolished. But water's significance extends far beyond our personal experiences – it is the foundation of life on Earth, and its fundamental importance resonates deeply within us.

However, in the Netherlands, water has been seen as a treat rather than an inspiration. Over time, the Dutch have increasingly tried to control the water, gain land, and protect against floods. We take pride in our innovative ways to conquer the water, right now water is monitored and controlled every second. But when you go back in time, you'll come to realise that this land is originally wet, swampy, and blurry. The Netherlands was originally a seemingly endless swamp, cut by slow rivers that ended in the sea. A washed-up, pushed-up, and windswept land. The landscape was similar to the current Biesbosch, but much bigger: an endless area of water, small dunes, sand ridges, and wetlands, filled with fish, birds, and small game (Bank et al., 2021).

The natural landscape, determined by water, was seen as a frightening enemy that needed to be fought (Mostert, 2020). By building dikes and pumping water out, the Dutch proudly managed to accomplish that task. However, as said by the artist Joseph Beuys (Metz & Van Den Heuvel, 2012), the spiritual eye of the Netherlands closed as the water of the Ijsselmeer was slowly made into land. Is that true or are there hidden values of water remaining in the Netherlands?

Since nature is often a source for a spiritual, transcendent, or sublime experience (Roncken, 2018), landscape architecture is an interesting starting point. A transcendent experience makes people experience boundlessness that can overwhelm or even destroy the observer. It is triggered by the experience of something greater than oneself and connected with awe and a sense of terror. It has the power of awakening mystical moods (Bethelmy & Corraliza, 2019). In the last years, it has become clear that the fight against the water is not maintainable. Rising sea levels, land subsidence, salinisation, drought and loss of biodiversity show the negative effects of keeping water out of the country. As a result, a countermovement is gaining ground, water is let in again by flooding riverbeds, drowning polders, and residential areas (Metz & Van Den Heuvel, 2012). This new attitude brings the opportunity to engage in a meaningful and spiritual relationship with water. Can the spiritual eye open again?

Architectural design can bring this new development beyond something rational or simply aesthetic or picturesque (Dewsbury & Cloke, 2009).

So, the notion of spirituality may provide the key to a design repertoire that goes beyond the aesthetic, rational, and rigid relationship with water. This aim is expressed in the following research question:

How can the Dutch landscape be designed to enhance the spiritual connection between people and water and create a transcendent experience?

This main research question aims to define characteristics or qualities for an architectural repertoire. Two sub-questions help to find an understanding of the current and possible spiritual relationship with water and a third sub-question focuses on design strategies:

- What are the historical and contemporary meanings and expressions of water?

- What kind of experiences of water would the Dutch people engage with according to the culture?

- What (landscape) architectonical means can create more/other meaningful experiences of water?

The meaning of water can be researched by looking into expressions of the perception of water. This can be in the shape of various forms of art, like paintings, land art, architecture, and poetry. But also, in an analysis of rituals, habits, and philosophies in the Netherlands. Or in stories and memories of water. Existing studies have already shown the significance of water for the identity of the Dutch (Jensen, Mostert, Tracy & Metz, Geuzen) But do not give an insight into the spiritual aspect of water.

Because I feel that this is an important and underexplored topic, I want to investigate how non-religious architecture can support spiritual concepts. Hypothetically, if we understand how architecture can

enhance a spiritual connection with water, we can stimulate a new era in the everchanging perception of water and offer a more inclusive place for spiritual development.

To answer the research question, this paper is structured in the following way: the first chapter will focus on defining the meaning of water and its relation to architecture and spirituality. The second chapter aims to highlight my own experience of water in the Biesbosch. As to connect the subjective and intangible aspects of the meaning of water with the context of the Biesbosch, its rituals, and the symbolism of the space; this is followed by the material representation of the immaterial values. How does the spiritual practice translate into space?

RESEARCH APPROACH

Architecture as a design principle has a speculative role in creating meaningful, affecting, and environmentally responsive futures. It is the intermediate between the intangible and the tangible. It expresses spiritual values, for example how a sequence of an entrance, path, and place represents a spiritual journey or quest (Barrie, 2010). Physical expressions like this make the experience of the building intentional and raise awareness of the body and spirit. Architecture entails symbols that bridge the material and immaterial world and mediate between the past and the present, the known and the unknown, and the one with the many.

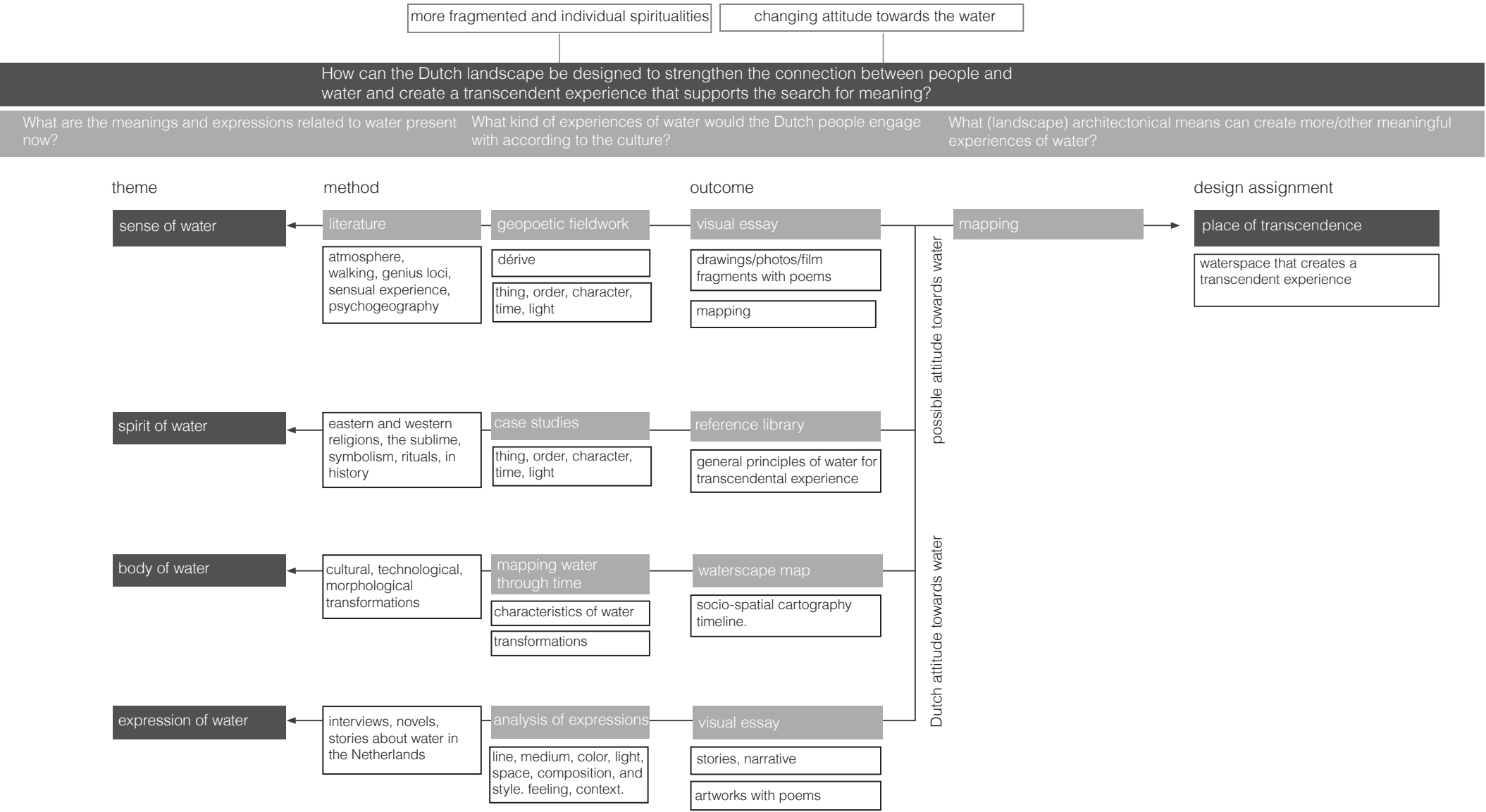
This research will inform an architectural design that evokes a transcendent feeling by deepening the spiritual connection with water. To do so, the research approach dives into four themes: sense of water, spirit of water, body of water, and expression of water. These themes are explored by a literature review and a creative and designerly interpretation of the themes with fieldwork, case studies, and mapping. Literature is applied to understand existing theories, findings, and perspectives on the spirituality of water and the relation with water in the Netherlands. It covers a wide range of sources from philosophy, psychology, art, history, and phenomenology.

Sense of water aims to understand how water is experienced in specific landscapes, so it can inspire the design and provide a deep understanding of the landscape to eventually design for. As there are many aspects of religion and other spiritualities that relate to water (Oestigaard, 2005), the theme spirit of water aims to understand existing spiritual values and practices related to water. This will lead to a reference library with design principles. More specific to the Dutch context, body of water aims to understand the physical characteristics and transformations of the waterscape as well as the social effects and goals behind it. This will deepen the understanding of the landscape and the physical expressions of the relation with water. The expression of water looks deeper into the mental relationship with water in the Netherlands. The developments of religion and the idea of God are intertwined with depictions in art, so

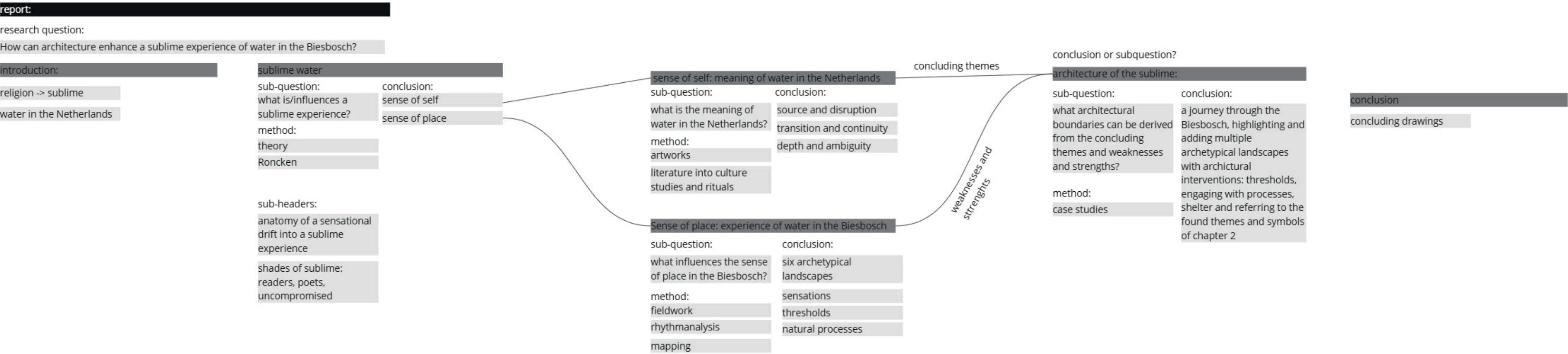
by looking at the history of art, we can understand the history of the spirit of the Netherlands (Lemaire, 2007). From these subconscious attitudes, we can derive inspiration and weave forward on the genius loci of the Netherlands.

These four themes lead to the final step, which is to use mapping (Corner, 1999) to combine the insights from the themes to form a new way of knowing the spiritual value of water, which will lead to the possibilities of the design.

Figure 3 presents the influences on the spirituality of water in the Netherlands as embodied in the outcomes of the methods that will be discussed in the paper. With the help of these studies, this research aims to apply the notion of the spirituality of water as part of the architectural repertoire for the design, illustrated on the right.



4. Research framework for designing transcendent experiences with water in the Dutch landscape



5. Structure of this report, in the framework of the sublime, the sense of self and sense of place will be analysed in relation to the Netherlands and more specifically the Biesbosch.

METHODOLOGY

Location:

This study aims to compare different experiences of water by focusing on multiple locations where the tension between water and land or man is visible. Some locations include where water has (regained) the upper hand, like the coast, drowned polders, or rivers with flooded riverbeds. Or where land controls the water, like the planned polders in Flevoland and the Randstad. Or in cities like Rotterdam and towns around the Deltawerken or the Afsluitdijk. These locations will be studied during the fieldwork of sense of water and possibly body of water and expression of water to eventually be narrowed down to one location to design for.

1. Sense of water

In this theme, the sources of literature offer the basis for aspects to focus on during the fieldwork and place the method within the broader context of phenomenology. The literature study aims to interpret predecessors that engaged with a deeper understanding of the environment, by walking and or writing poetry.

For example, the Situationists, described walking, more specifically aimless wandering or *dérive*, as an important mean to have an immersive experience and deep understanding of the environment (Wark, 2008). By drifting, the hidden fleeting, vague, and atmospheric character can be revealed.

But also, poetry is a method to experience, understand, and express the connection between the world and the earth, human beings, and the earth-cosmic context. In the West, romantics used poetry to describe the sublime (Roncken, 2018), and in China, artists painted scrolls of immersive landscapes with poems (Lemaire, 2007). More recently, practisers of geopoetics aim to apply poetry to regain the connection between senses, place, and immaterial values (Thomas, 2016). Geopoetics goes beyond the individual experience and dives deeper into the cultural and ecological aspects of the landscape.

The fieldwork will have a specific focus on aspects needed for a mythical understanding of the environment (Norberg-Schulz): thing, order character, light, and time. Within this aspect, special attention will be paid to sensual experience, embodiment and movement, memory and emotion, and materiality. Based on the theories of Juhani Pallasmaa (2005).

6. A pond of water in Rotterdam: offering a sense of calmness and relief in the vibrancy of the city





7. A view onto the North Sea: borders of the Netherlands that allow a vulnerable encounter of water
8. Drawings from fieldwork at the beach: showing the raw experience strong natural forces

Walking and writing will involve the landscape, and lead to a thick description of circumstances and feelings of specific landscapes, that can match the design of a transcendent experience. The findings of the fieldwork will be analysed in a visual essay that combines photos, drawings, and film fragments with poetry. This will inform the design by understanding and valuing the sense of place which makes it possible to ‘construct situations’ (Wark, 2008).

2. Spirit of water

This theme will investigate the symbolic meaning of water and its expression in architecture. It is based on literature research into rituals and meanings of water in religion and philosophies. Since rituals are involved with the production of the cultural and social world they exist in, they show the importance of landscapes for past and present societies (Conan, 2007). Rituals are a specific set of repetitive physical performances that turn profane actions into symbolic expressions that can enhance transcendence and sacredness (Hobson et al., 2017). Religions like Buddhism and in particular Taoism will be investigated for their affinity with water. For example, Taoism has a clear philosophy that one should be like water (Giblett, 2009). The softness and humility of water symbolise the virtues of this philosophy. In the West, where Christianity is more prominent, rituals like baptism can be analysed, or secular rituals like the New Year’s Dive.

The values of the literature research are used in case studies that relate to the spirituality of water. Like the water temple from Tadao Ando (Ando & Fernández-Galiano, 2022) or the Water Moon monastery designed by Kris Yao (Čákyová & Vranayová, 2018). The case studies will also be tested on the same aspects as the sense of water: thing, order, character, light, and time.

Together these methods inform the design by providing a library of design principles on how water is shaped, sacralised, and ritualised to create a transcendent experience.

3. Body of water

For this theme, the literature review focuses on historical accounts of water-related transformations in the Netherlands, with attention to the physical transformations as well as their effect on Dutch society.

With mapping, the physical aspects and hidden forces are discovered and reformulated to automatically make design possibilities visible (Corner, 1999). Experimentation with the hidden knowledge of contemporary, historical, and imaginative maps, landscape elements like dikes but also natural processes, and findings from the literature review allow a deep understanding of past and present realities of water. The map constructs the unconscious of society and looks past constructed perceptions. In the end, this theme can be linked with the other themes by mapping the different findings in a comprehensive map.

4. Expression of water

This theme analyses the mental connection of the Dutch with water by looking at water-related expressions through time. The

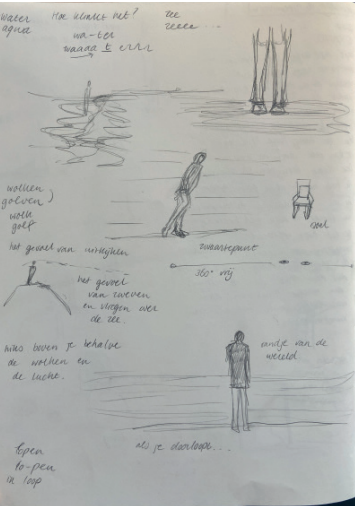
sources for the literature review consist of novels, interviews as well as a general analysis of art and architecture. Some books already explore art in relation to water in the Netherlands, like Zoet and Zout (Metz & Van Den Heuvel, 2012) or Polders! Gedicht Nederland (Geuze & Feddes, 2005). These will be studied and extended with a deeper interpretation and relating to spirituality and findings of the other themes.

Besides literature, paintings, poems, landscape art, theatre, films, and more are studied on their spiritual relation with water. The expressions are analysed by describing, analysing, interpreting, and evaluating the works, focusing on content, context and meaning, composition, and format. The content depicts the importance of the subject for the artist and therefore the society at the time, people show the relationship with water. But also, tone or stroke tells us about the emotions regarding water, and mysticism or rather realism shows a spiritual or scientific outlook.

The results of the analysis are summarised in a visual essay with text connected to artworks.

Overlap:

The four themes are not as strictly divided as depicted in the diagram, and the design is not simply a result of the outcomes of the studies. The themes overlap and inform each other, for instance, an overlap of the timeline of the body of water and the expression of water can show how certain changes were expressed in art or how some artworks might have inspired social change. During the research, ideas will already come forward and stimulate side studies that will also inform the eventual design.



reader's consonance
reader's dissonance
poet's consonance
poet's dissonance
the liminal
the unrepresentable



1. The sublime : embracing duality

With the disappearing role of religion, an understanding and enhancement of the sublime can be a contemporary resolution in the search for meaning. The sublime is best understood as an experience that is too grand and complex to comprehend, which causes a sensation of anxiety or even horror (Roncken, 2020).

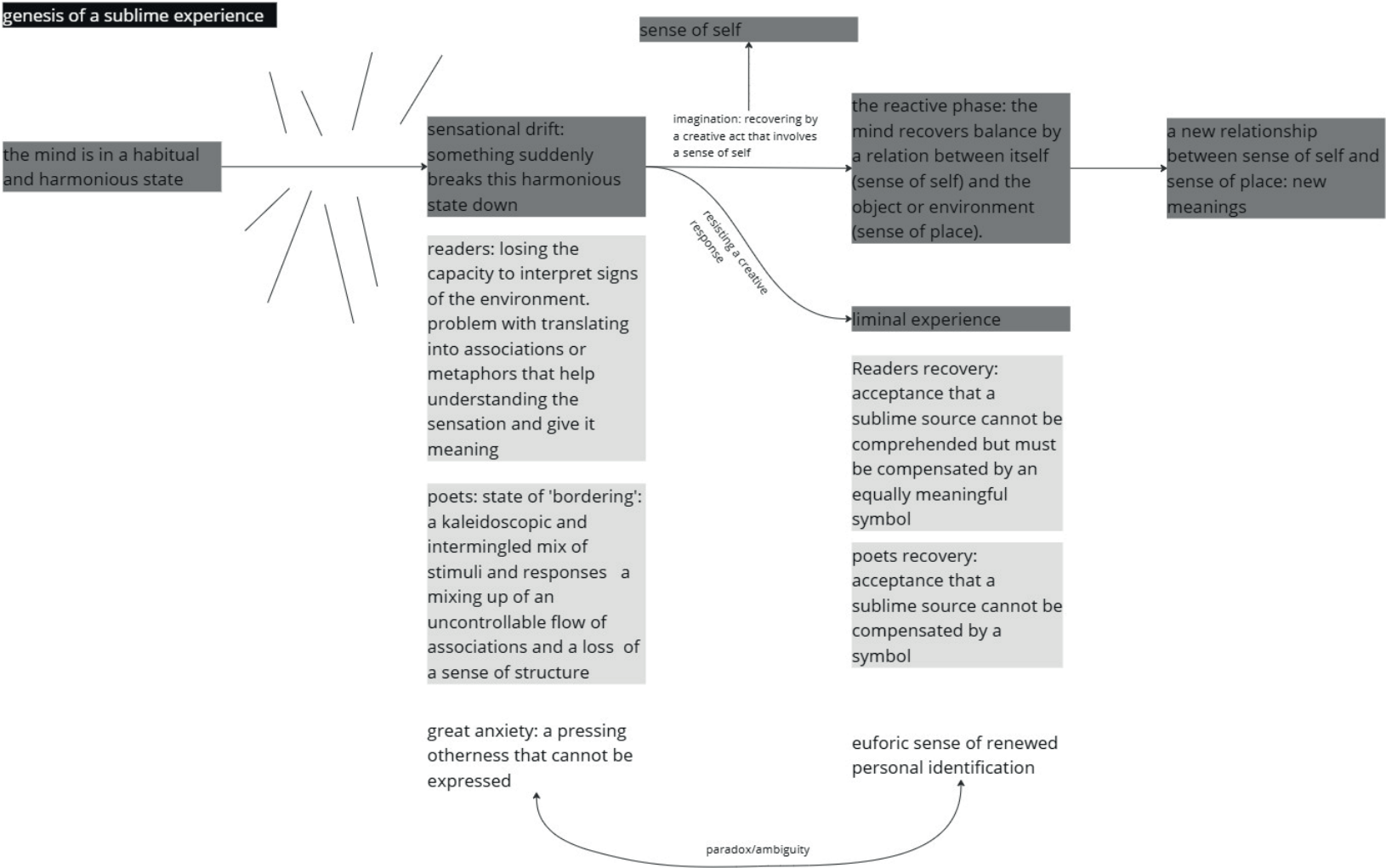
1.1 Defining the sublime
The sublime is a highly debated term in landscape theory. The most prominent contributors to this field are Longinus, Burke and Kant. Paul Roncken (2020) has elaborated on these

‘founding fathers’ by exploring the work of Thomas Weiskel and complemented it by researching Buddhism.

1.2 The process of sensations turning into a sublime experience
The process of a sensation turning into a sublime experience is explained by Weiskel in a sequence of 3 stages. It begins with the mind in a habitual state, more or less unconscious and in harmony with the sense of self. This harmonious relationship is then disrupted unexpectedly: the mind encounters something

that seems to contain a meaning that is not in harmony with our mind. For instance, a natural phenomenon so immense or complex, catches the experiencer unprepared, defying immediate understanding. Since the inner and outer world do no longer correspond with each other, the mind turns inward, seeking a way to reconcile this balance. In the final, reactive phase, the mind regains a sense of harmony between the inner and outer world by establishing a renewed relationship between itself and the object or surroundings. So, the sublime experience arises

9. Scheme of the six shades of the sublime
10. Nickel trailing #34, Edward Burtynsky, 1996
11. Schematic overview of sensations becoming sublime experiences





12. Building the Oosterscheldekering, Rijkswaterstaat, 1981: Sublime in the Netherlands

with the disruption of a habitual state by an experiential disorder and a recovery of some kind. Showing the paradoxical relationship between the great anxiety of the disruption and a euphoric sense of renewed personal identification.

In the second phase, there are two possible types of disruption, namely the reader's and the poets. Both are based on a broken relationship between language and the complexity of nature and a frustration to express this sensational drift.

The readers sublime explains a disrupted relationship between meaning and language. Which causes a person to lose the capacity to create associations and interpreted what is happening. The experiencer sees the signs of the surroundings but cannot convert them into associations or metaphors that normally help to understand the sensation and give it meaning.

The poets sublime describes a state of 'bordering': a kaleidoscopic intermingling of stimuli and responses. In this state, a person is mixed up in an uncontrollable flow of associations and loses a sense of structure. Time and space become fluid perceptions, causing memories to feel as in happening right now and faraway lands to appear close by. Poets are benefiting from this state, since they can properly use creativity and imagination to make sense of this disruptive state.

Both the poets as the readers sublime are thus followed by a reactive phase, which resolves the disturbance of harmony between sense of self and sense of place. Roncken describes this transition as a double movement: a recovery of an inner habitual breakdown by an outward creative expression.

This resolution can be seen as something 'awful' in the eyes of Weiskel, since the creative process prevents a person from experiencing the liminal state. Meaning perceiving the threshold or bordering sensation of the sublime. The resistance of this creative solution to the disruption leads therefore to the liminal state.

1.3 Sense of self

The sublime is inherently related to the sense of self: the ego, a soul, etc. The experience of the sublime can lead to a shift in the sense of self and can lead to development of self-knowledge. Seeing that the sublime experience starts with a breakdown of habits, therefore a breakdown of sense of self, we can understand that it is not the external object or phenomenon that causes a disruption, but its relationship with the self. In the fleeting and horrific moment of incapacity, the ungraspable source of the sublime will be interpreted by what remains known: the sense of self. This recovery is not only a relief of anxiety, but also a symbol of identification. This causes the paradoxical experience of fright and glory.

A reader's sense of self is related to a symbol of identification that resolves the lack of meaningful context needed to understand what is sensed. There is trouble in expressing an awareness of a greater power. The recovery of this type is found in accepting that the sublime source cannot be comprehended but can be compensated by an equally meaningful symbol. This symbol not only signifies the

importance of the sublime source but can also become a cultural token that expresses the vacuum embedded in the source. The symbolic representation is an imperfect representation of the original which expresses the renewed sense of self. it is important to remember that there is still an incapacity to contextualize, articulate of express; there remains a void. The poet's sublime encompasses a flow of associations that goes beyond the physical limitations of the body in time and space. In this state, there exists a wish to be overtaken by pleasurable stimuli while being afraid of being incorporated, overwhelmed and annihilated. A poets sense of self may end in a sense of universal truth or a state of being untainted by traces of time and therefore overwhelm experiencer. Even if this state is not 'true', the sense of density of meaning can evoke a sense of deep understanding. The poets symbol of identification does not try to compensate for the 'void', but rather captures the sensational revelation. There is a sense of loss in the feeling that the symbol can never coincide with the original sublime source. However, even If the physical limitations of the body prevent

ultimately experiencing the poets sublime, it can also help relieving the impossible poet's symbol through labour.

Both types of recovery remain problematic: the readers sublime is only a weakened representation of the source and the poets sublime has no possibility to participate in the flow of 'otherness'. Still, both recoveries create meaning related to the sense of self.

Roncken adds two variations to Weiskels threefold categories: dissonance. It refers to an inconsistent relationship with one's sense of self.

Another way to deal with the reactive phase of the sublime is the liminal: eliminating imagination and resisting recovery. This is related to Buddhism and the practice of the absence of a sense of self. A possible method to achieve this state is meditation, which allows a person to gain familiarity with the process of sensations becoming experiences. In Buddhism, symbols and identities are seen as problematic. It praises accepting the process of continuous change and resisting holding on to a certain belief or sense of self, establishing an inner calm.

Beyond the liminal there is the 'unpresentable', which is in fact a prolonged liminal state. The liminal state can be seen as a process towards the unpresentable instead of a final goal. The unpresentable is only possible after training in meditative techniques.

These types of the sublime can be concluded in six shades of the sublime which form possible instruments in the making of meaning. This structure helps to understand how to participate in the design of experiences and in the making or breaking of meaning.



13. Among the Sierra Nevada, Albert Bierstadt, 1868



14. Polder Landscape, Jan van Goyen, 1644

These two painting show the apparent difference between imaginations of the sublime and the landscape in the Netherlands: crashing water, high mountains, wildlife and sun steeping through thick clouds. Compared to endless views, windmills controlling water and thick grey skies

2. Sense of self: meaning of water in the Netherlands

To find how architecture can enhance the sublime experience of water in the Netherlands and Biesbosch, we need to understand in what way water is already meaningful, or in terms of the sublime, which sense of self exists. Symbols are an expression of the connection between a person and the larger whole. They are the bridge between the immaterial and material world and mediate the past with the present, the known with the unknown, and the one with the many. Symbols stand between the sacred and the profane and since they represent

the eternal, symbols are a key to permanence.

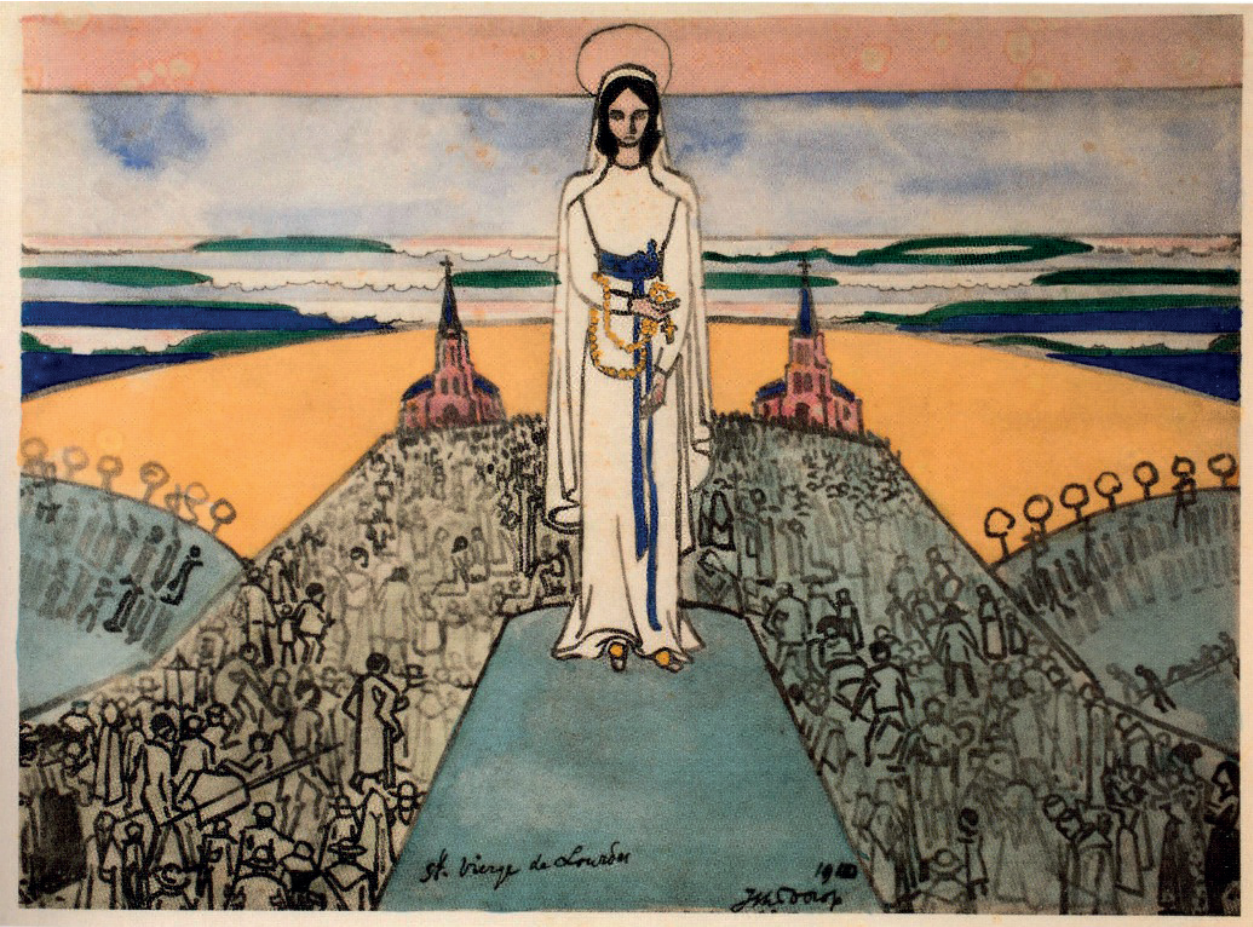
‘Water has been interwoven with social interaction from profane activities to religious ceremonies all over the world from time immemorial.’ (Oestigaard, 2005) The intangible aspects of water are expressed in artworks, symbolism, and literature.



15. The union of Earth and Water, Peter Paul Rubens, 1618
This painting portrays Neptune as the embodiment of water. Alongside him is Ceres, the personification of the earth's fertility and abundance, symbolizing the Netherlands. Their hands join over an urn, representing the Scheldt, the crucial waterway linking the Netherlands to the sea. The urn illustrates how the Scheldt both unites and separates the realms of land and sea, embodying their interdependence. This painting was a plea for peace between the northern and southern parts of the land, showing the importance of water for the Netherlands

1.1 Transition and Continuity

Water is often used to symbolise change and transitions. Many rituals have fundamentals in this idea, for example, baptism. This perception of water is recognizable in artworks throughout time. A contemporary expression of this theme is seen in the photographs of Rineke Dijkstra (fig. 13). These pictures not only show the transition from youth to adolescence but also show the vulnerability of these children. This reflects the insecurities of the models, relating to the previous theme of depth. The pictures place the children in front of the vastness of the seemingly infinite ocean, evoking a sense of connection to other waters and timelessness. Water as a symbol of change or transition is a recurring theme in most religions. In Christianity, baptism clears the baptised of sin and protects the person from evil forces. In Judaism, the Mikvah is a ritual bath that purifies a visitor of the synagogue before entering. This is therefore a physical testimony to the convictions and traditions of this religion. This is similar to traditions in Islam, where it is mandatory to cleanse before approaching God for prayer. To accommodate this, some mosques



16. Beach portait, Rineke Dijkstra, 1992
The pictures of Rineke Dijkstra show a modern interpretation of water. In her works, the water of the ocean is used as a background for showing youth that is transitioning into a new phase: adolescence. The ocean unites the different models, and evokes the thought that we all originate from the water.

17. Onze Lieve Vrouw van Lourdes, Jan Toorop, 1910
Jan Toorop travelled to Lourdes in hope to heal from his disease. The water there is believed to be sacred and healing. His painting is monumental with its clear symmetry and the saint in the centre, highlighting the importance of the water and showing the heaps of people that ae on pilgrimage to this source of water.

have pools and fountains in the courtyards, which also serve as a symbol of purity. In ancient Greece, people believed that the river Styx separated the world from the living and the dead (Oestigaard, 2020) This signifies that water is a medium for transformation, also in different stages of life. A specific example of a related ritual in the Netherlands is the Nieuwjaarsduik.

Likewise, healing and purification are also forms of transition. It represents the transformed state after being

submerged in water. The transformative power of water. A physical representation of the healing power of water is the well with sacred or holy water. Many believe that the water in these wells has special powers that can cure the sick. Yearly, still, many people, religious or not, embark on journeys leading to these wells. In this way, water also represents the feeling of hope for a better future. In Shinto, the indigenous spirituality of Japan, water is also seen as a purifying element and is featured in shrines to cleanse the hands and mouths of visitors

before entering. In other cultures, like Norse mythology, the well stands for a source of wisdom and fate (Oestigaard, 2005).

In seeming contrast with water as a symbol for change, is the association of water with continuity and flow. Water has a dual quality of this changing and temporal shape in contrast with space and time-connecting quality. To illustrate this, the water we are drinking right now has also passed generations of animals and plants that lived on this planet. It entails a boundless nature a connection with everything in time and space, maybe even beyond. ‘That which is neither this nor that, and yet it is both’ (Turner 1991: 99). Water transcends and unites culture and nature because it is simultaneously both. Water beats the dichotomy between nature and culture since it is eminent in both. So, even though water is continuously changing, it simultaneously bears an outstanding sameness: whether water is seen from the biological, social, or geological perspective, it remains the same.



18. Broken Circle/Spiral Hill, Robert Smithson, 1971
This landart reclaims a post-industrial landscape. Because of the scale, it could be seen as an architectural intervention, a framework to influence the experience of the sense of place and sense of self. The repetitive and circular movement of climbing the hill and walking towards the water can be meditative and disorienting and makes us aware of our relation to nature and the water. Do we enjoy it from a viewpoint, in distance and fascination or do we prefer to be lower and closer and surrounded by the water? There is a debate whether the artwork should be maintained or if nature should be able to take over, which shows the changing and various perceptions regarding the relationship between man and nature.



19. Willibrord well, Oss, the Netherlands
The Willibrord wells are known for their healing powers, making them a revered pilgrimage site. These wells have many traditions and rituals symbolising good fortune and embodying mystical forces. They are a testament to the transformative and enigmatic power of water.



20. De zeeuwse wateren bij Schouwen, Petrus Johannes Schotel, 1825
Many Dutch paintings depict ships at sea, reflecting the nation's maritime heritage and its role in Dutch prosperity. These artworks convey a sense of grandeur and majesty, and capture both the calm and tumultuous nature of the waters. They celebrate the bravery of seafaring and the adventurous spirit of the Dutch, who thrived despite the sea's unpredictability. These paintings' vast, flowing waters symbolize enormity and boundlessness, inviting viewers to imagine the mysteries beneath the surface. Such paintings embody the duality of water—both dangerous and prosperous—and underscore the Dutch relationship with the sea as a source of both adventure and commercial gain.



21. Regenerative Flows, Sep Verboom, 2023
As part of an installation regarding healing water, this artwork shows the hydrochemical process of growing limestone. This artwork reflects upon the processes water plays a role in and invites the viewer to slow down and find peace in these slow but fascinating evolution.

22. View of Haarlem and Haarlemmermeer, Jan van Goyen, 1646

This painting shows the reclamation of the lake to land. The dooming sky hints towards the storms this lake has endured. The development of the polder is thus depicted as something positive, bringing prosperity to the country. Although the water is important to the story, the sky takes up most of the space. This is typical for Dutch landscape painters in the 17th century.



‘Water symbolises the whole of potentiality: it is the fons et origo, the source of all possible existence ... water symbolises the primal substance from which all forms came and to which they will return’ (Eliade 1979: 188).

1.2 Source and destruction

Water symbolises life, growth, and creation since it is essential for all living beings and is seen as the source of life. Religious beliefs throughout time and space emphasize that same conviction. Water enriches life and its absence destroys life. (Oestigaard, 2005) M. Eliade, for example, writes: ‘Water symbolises the whole of potentiality: it is the fons et origo, the source of all possible existence ... water symbolises the primal substance from which all forms came and to which they will return’ (Eliade 1979: 188).

Water itself is also a representation of the divine and a mediator between humans and God. It entails divine powers itself. This is seen in rivers like the Ganges. But in other faiths, the water is rather a place for deities and spirits to reside. Water represents the presence of a higher power. It occurs often in religious texts and rituals. In the Christian paradise, the fountain of life. God is described as the spring of living water. In the Quran, there is also a fountain of life.

More specifically for the Netherlands, where Christianity has been the most eminent



23. Paradise of earthly delights, Jheronimus Bosch, 1503–1515

In this depiction of paradise, water is everywhere and most importantly in the shape of the lake at the center. From the water, all kinds of creatures arise, which symbolise fertility, abundance and the source of life. The purity of the water in the fountain of life in the left panel is highlighted by the depiction of crystals, from this source animals are drinking water.

The water also reflects the contrast between purity and sin. In the panel where hell is depicted, the water is dark, gloomy and frozen, symbolising decay and corruption. The water is clear and blue in other areas, which symbolises innocence and sacredness. It shows the dual character of water: which is both peaceful as dangerous.

And it also shows the danger of the water: the pleasure, but also the fate that will follow. The fountain placed at the heart of the panel also predicts a bad ending. Its shape mirrors the fountain of the left panel. But the surface of this one is cracked, conveying the idea of the impermanent nature of earthly pleasures.

The painting also reflects upon the choices one makes in life and the effect it has on life after death, representing the journey of life, which is often symbolised by waterways. The three panels depict genesis, paradise and hell and are connected by a river.



24. Findings of offerings in swamp, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden
Swamps and other wet areas in the Netherlands were seen as a transition into the spiritual world, and were places of sacrifices in hopes to please the gods of the natural world.



25. The Jewish Cemetery, Jacob van Ruisdael, 1650
This shows a sublime landscape in which the abandoned tombs, ruined church, storm clouds, and rainbow allude to the temporality of worldly things and takes the beholder into a world of transcendent meaning (Dia.org) The stream is constantly moving, changing, and regenerating, symbolizing the vibrance of life (Christenzen).

26. The Garden of Eden, Erastus Salisburgh Field, 1860
Another depiction of water in paradise, peaceful, blue with a small and harmless waterfall.

27. Winter Landscape with Skaters, Hendrick Avercamp, 1608
This painting shows people enjoying their time on the ice, expressing the relation dutch people have with the water and how it changes during different seasons. It is a place where people come together and have a pleasant time.

religion, water plays a significant role in the story of creation: “At the beginning, one river flows out of Eden, to become the watershed that cradles civilization (Gen 2:10–14)”. This explains why water is often depicted in visions of the Garden of Eden or of paradise, like Figure 5 or 7.

Besides the spiritual connotations, water is also associated with the creation of vitality and liveliness. This has a great influence on the lives of Dutch people as many people seek joy around the water and activities like swimming, riding a boat, or ice skating (fig.8). Another important association that Dutch people have with the water is that of prosperity, through commerce and trade (Metz & Van Den Heuvel, 2012). In line with that, calm waters are also reminders of the adaptability of the Dutch, making it possible to live in this area.

28. Deltawerk, RAAAF, 2018
Deltawerk questions the urge of the Dutch people to strive for immunity against natural forces. The composition and destruction of the blocks evokes the feeling that despite its efforts, it could not withstand the force of water and embraces vulnerability. By designing a route through these massive blocks, this becomes an immersive and conscious experience. It offers space for non-human species and transforms over time. By adapting an existing structure, tension arises where past present and future coexist and create new meaning.

29. Dijkdoorbraak tijdens de Zeeuwse overstroming op 14 en 15 januari 1808, Johannes Hermanus Koekkoek, 1808
Looking at this picture evokes the feeling of fear, an uncontrollable force destructs everything that comes in its way. The force can seem supernatural and the disaster as a punishment from god.



Yet there is a complex relationship with water, as it is a mix of admiration, dependence, and awe. In the Netherlands as well, there are many descriptions of creatures that live in the water and the association varies between givers of good luck and prosperity and the abduction of people (Jensen, 2020).

Where water can be calm and peaceful, it can also be strong and violent. During storms, many villages in the

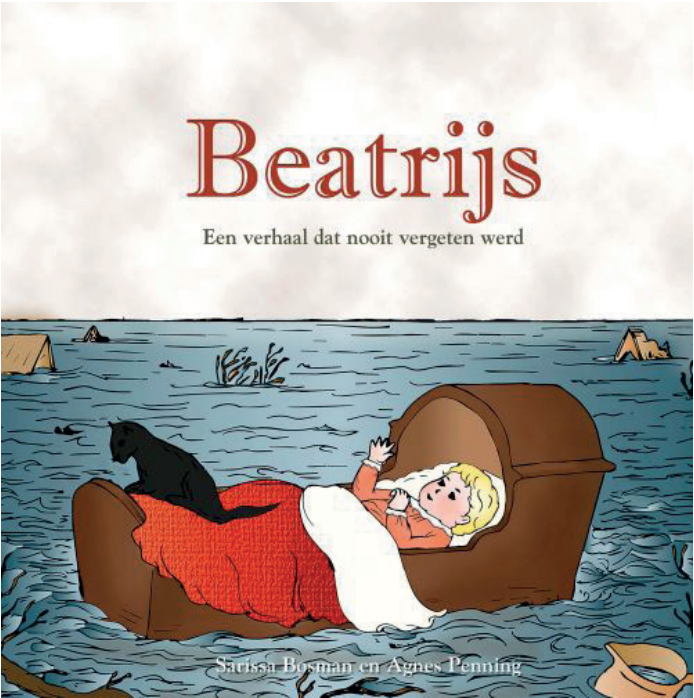
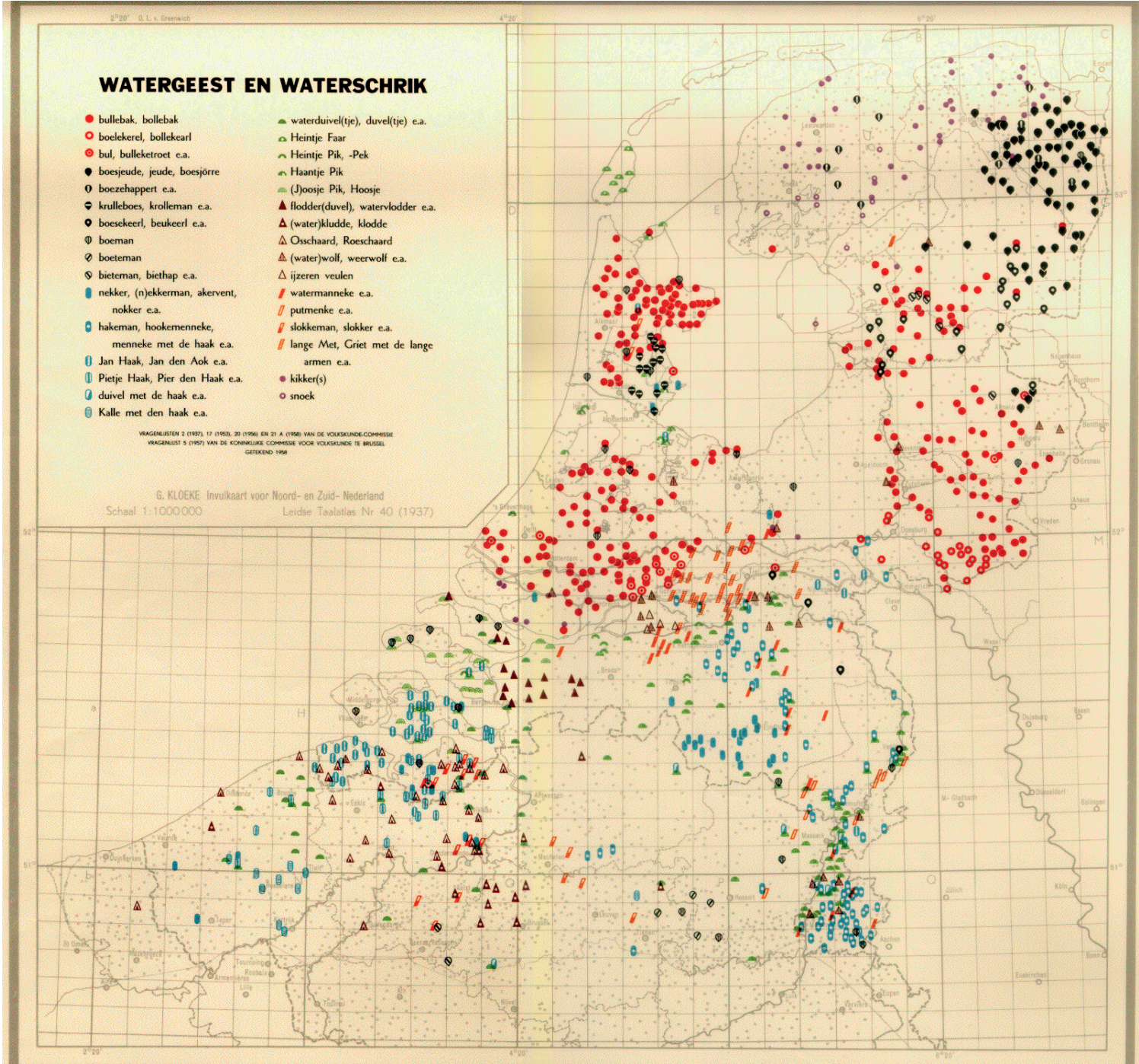
Netherlands have struggled with floods. These floods and storms were often associated with godly presence and the idea of punishment (Jensen, 2020). Despite our current control over the water, this battle remains the most present actor in shaping the meaning of water in the Netherlands. It represents the struggle for survival and protection against the water and the innovation and engineering that made that possible.



“Het hoofd boven water houden”

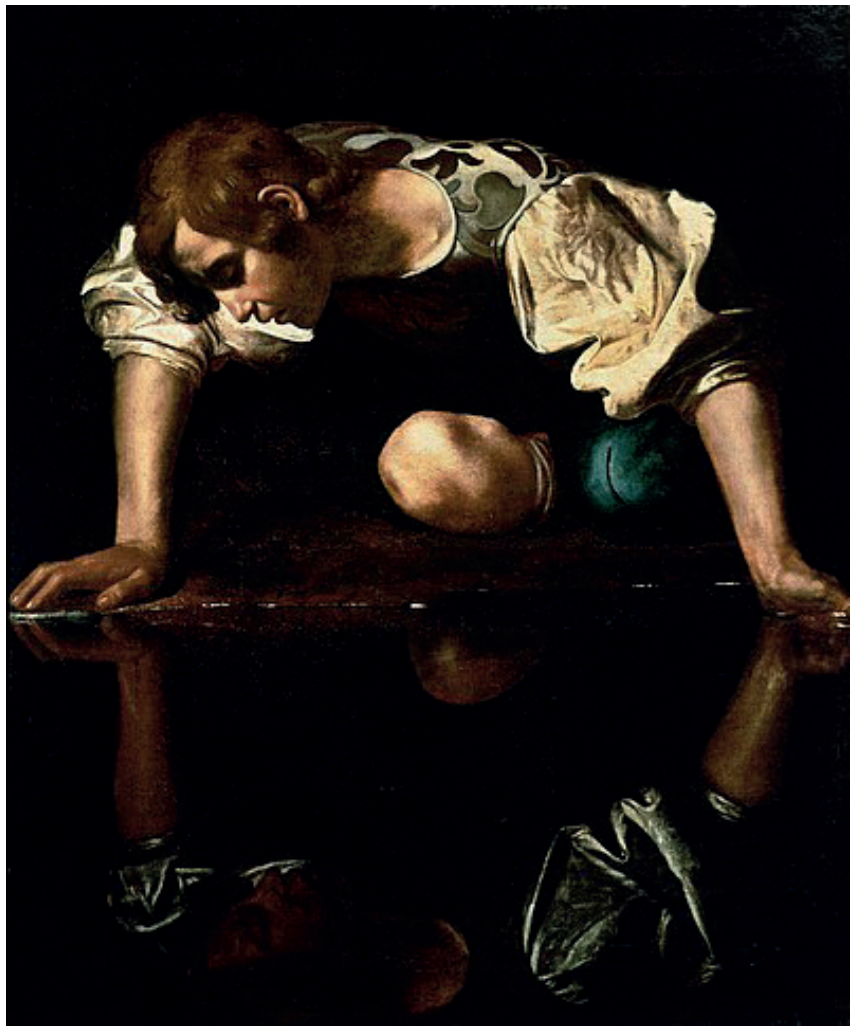
30. Waters, Robin de Puy, 2023
This picture is part of a series to remember the 1953 flood portraying people who experienced the flood disaster or grew up in the shadow of what their parents and grandparents experienced. It shows that the fear for disaster and the pain it brought still remains in the minds of Dutch people.

31. Sint Elizabethsvloed, Master of the Holy Elisabeth-Panels, 1490
In 1421 a flood destroyed large parts of the Netherlands, including the Biesbosch. It shows the effects of the flood: people are fleeing, but many people are generous to help.



32. Waterghost and fear of water, Meertens and de Meyer, 1958
Showing the different names for beasts that parents used to make sure their children stayed away from the water.

33. Beatrijs, a story that was never forgotten, Bosman and Penning, 2015
From the Elizabethsflood and the painting from figure 26 a myth arised, in which a cat protected a baby. This depiction came back in many films, books, stories and paintings regarding a flood. The cat is the symbol of support for children in the frightening context of the flood.



34. Mountain Stream near Finnmark in Norway, by Moonlight, Alexander Wüst, 1867
This painting shows a romantic illustration of a stream, which seems sacred through the use of light and represents the sublime feeling one can have when encountering water. This sublime association with water is mostly focused on streams with forceful water or waterfalls, which are the popular and impressive subjects of paintings. Since the Netherlands does not have these kinds of water, but rather slow moving rivers in the Delta, is this sublime sensation still possible?

35. Narcissus, Caravaggio, 1597
This shows the story of narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection. Reflection is an important aspect of water and many are lost in introspection due to the peaceful or melancholic atmosphere it brings. This painting also expresses this by dissolving the surroundings and expressing the deep focus and connection with the water or in relation to the story, the self.

1.3 Complexity and Ambiguity

The depths and fluidity of water mirror the complexities of human feelings and hidden parts of the psyche. A notorious example of this is Freud's analogy with the subconscious mind and an iceberg, which implies that 70% of the mind is underwater (Freud, 1915). The thoughts that are deepest are also the most repressed and socially unaccepted. Outside of the water are the thoughts that are most on the surface, which are generally accepted and controlled. This symbolises our fear of water, especially deep

and vast waters.

Moving waters seem to reflect the movement and chaotic nature of our thoughts in a way that not many other elements can. We can be captivated by this movement for hours on end. Bodies of water stimulate contemplation and express a sense of solitude or loneliness (fig. 9). Many people experience a sense of ease or relaxation when being near water or submerged in water. Besides, it is the only element on this planet that offers the feeling of floating, the feeling of being underwater, when it is raining or when we are showering. Somehow, this element brings us closer to feeling connected with the cosmos and natural processes that expand beyond our immediate surroundings.

Additionally, the reflection of water stimulates a reflection of values (fig. 10). A relevant myth is the story of Narcissus, who was so captivated by his reflection in the water, that he fell in love with himself (Rose & Spawfort, 2016). This not only explains the enchanting effect of water, having the power to play tricks with our minds and distort reality but also the ability to awaken subconscious and suppressed feelings. The story of Narcissus furthermore tells us



the dangers of this tricking nature of water, as it ends in the demise of his character and eventually his passing.

In line with the complex nature of water is the dual character of softness and force. Water is soft in the sense that it changes shape depending on its surroundings. Paradoxically, water is strong and can destroy whole areas. This is an important theme for the philosophy of Taoism: “Water is fluid, soft, and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft, and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. This is another paradox: what is soft is strong” (Mitchell, 1988, Chapter 78).

The dual quality of water, which entails danger as well as prosperity holds the same characteristics required for the experience of the sublime, which is simultaneously fascinating and frightening. The Dutch have reluctantly tried to keep the water out because of the frightening aspects, but have therefore neglected the sublime qualities it can bring. As the Biesbosch is seen as the last wilderness of the Netherlands, this offers the opportunity to experience the sublime.

36. The Swamp, Anton Mauve, 1885
This painting evokes feeling of loneliness and retrospection. It is not often that a swamp is expressed in a painting, especially in the Netherlands. The water in this picture is associated with a certain melancholy, mirroring human emotions.

37. Moonlit Landscape with Bridge, Aert van der Neer, 1650
This dark scenery evokes the feeling of mystery

and relates the two lighted areas: the water and the moon. These two are intrinsically linked by the tidal movements, which is a mystical phenomenon. Again, the water reflects the surroundings, but distorted.

38. Landscape with canal, Jan Toorop, 1889
This painting spoke to me since it is unusually colourful compared to the paintings from the 17th century. It is an impression of a sunrise or sunset near a canal and it shows the beautiful and immersive quality of the water, which reflects

the colours of the sky. Compared to the most dutch landscape paintings, this artwork uses most space for the water instead of the sky. Another interesting aspect is the fact that the water is seemingly without any ripples, not idealising the force of the water of romantic paintings, but the peaceful and emotive quality of waterbodies. This is relevant for the Netherlands, since the water in the delta moves slow. The colours are not realistic but expressive and show how water effects the emotions of the painter while making this artwork.



“Het aan zijn water voelen”

“Stille wateren hebben diepe gronden”



legible landscapes
neglected landscapes
portal landscapes
horrific landscapes
liminal landscapes
unpresentable landscapes

3. Sense of place: sublime landscapes in the biesbosch

Besides understanding the sense of self of the Netherlands an analysis of the influences on the sense of place is needed. This analysis is focused on the Biesbosch, where the eventual design will take shape and begins with an understanding of the six archetypical landscapes that explain different sublime experiences.

3.1 Legible landscape (reader’s consonance)

Landscapes entail traces of culturalinfluencesandlandscapes can be ‘read’ by recognizing the signs and meanings of this culture. A legible landscape is experienced when a sensational disorder (something one cannot comprehend) is resolved by learning to interpret different viewpoints of the site or by researching the history of a site.

This recognition of a sign that fits an existing meaning allows sensations to become legible experiences. The experience that signs can be recognized in the complexity of landscapes results in a satisfactory solution to a distressing sensational disorder. Design can enhance the legibility of a landscape by narrative design or by physical signs such as traffic signs or mythological symbols. A design

can play with the tension between revealing and hiding the capacity to read a landscape by guiding the view toward an overview of the landscape or certain signifying elements. It can also selectively enhance certain sensory experiences like sounds, smells, and the sensation of humidity or temperature. A design can cause a harmonious experience or rather a similarity disorder.



39. Six archetypical landscapes, based on Roncken (2018)

40. Map showing the evaluation of different areas in the Biesbosch, concluding that the route in the southern part is the design location



The process of the experience of a disorder into a legible landscape adds meaning. The developed sense of place is harmonically related to the existing sense of self. There is no considerable disruption or unsatisfactory result.

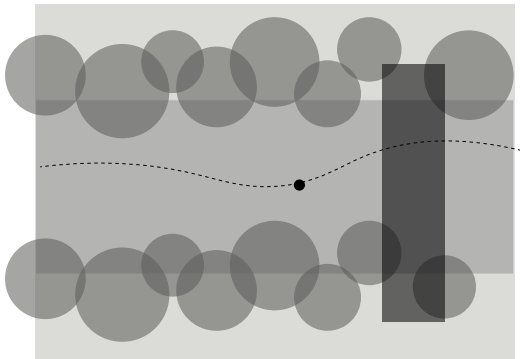
Since the Biesbosch is a landscape with clear historical traces, there are many places where a legible landscape is experienced. In certain areas, there is even a design intervention that highlights the existing signs in the landscape. For example, in the area surrounding the Biesbosch Museumeland, there is a path that guides the visitor along willow plantations (grienden) and a duck decoy. This route also includes a recreation of a ‘griendkeet’ to add to the historical narrative of the experience of the griendworkers. Besides the historical tokens of

the grienden, there are large parts of the Biesbosch that resemble landscapes we encounter in daily life: polders, dikes, willows, etc. This is thus in line with the existing sense of self and helps to understand the landscape. Concluding that there are already quite some legible landscapes present in this area, it could be better to focus on other, for instance, more dissonant, landscapes. However, the current symbols focus mainly on the historical narrative of the griend workers and there remains a possibility to focus on the symbolic meaning of water, as explored in Chapter 2.



41. Griend worker, part of the historical narrative the path follows
 42. Sculpture, landmark that helps with orientation
 43. Schrankkeet, rebuilt housing for the Griendworkers
 44. Map showing the route with the legible landscapes





45. Legible landscape: historical narrative of duck
decoy
46. Legible landscape: historical narraive of
crossings during World War II



3.2 Neglected landscapes (reader's dissonance)

When legible landscapes are not resolved in a harmonious understanding of recognised signs in relation to a sense of self, a neglected landscape is experienced. The same similarity disorder results in a dissonant experience since it is not recognized or 'put into place'. Intuitively these landscapes are avoided or abandoned. The sublime is perceived in the sense of an unconscious effort to release repressed energy by compensating actions and thoughts. Neglected landscapes can evoke equally neglected aspects of the self and can be seen as training grounds for the development of the self. Examples of possible training topics include material and food scarcity, physical endurance, and alienation.

These landscapes do not cause an increase in meaning but rather an absence of meaning, this offers opportunities for new meanings.

Since the Biesbosch is such a largely stretched area and disconnected from the 'normal' world, it is inherently a training ground, since physical endurance is needed and material and food scarcity and alienation are also relevant topics.

Additionally, the recognisable elements as discussed in the previous landscape, also offer the possibility to be disrupted and therefore experienced as a neglected landscape. For example, during heavy weather and rainfall, elements like flooded polders or pathways could disrupt habitual patterns and induce anxiety.

47. Neglected landscape: isolated bodies of water



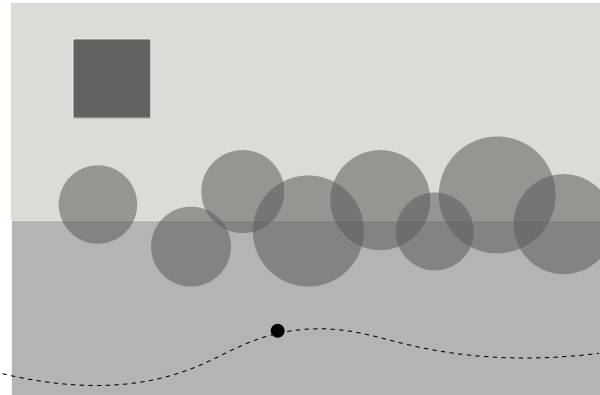


48. Neglected landscape: flooded paths

Even though these landscapes are experienced as terrifying, they influence the making of meaning. They are therefore an important aspect of the design. Similar to the reader's consonance, the symbols discovered in chapter two can help support a state of dissonance. Instead of applying the symbols to offer consonance, a disruption of these symbols induces a breaking of meaning or even a making of new meaning. In that way, existing problematic meanings, like a fear of water and the need for control over the water, can be renewed into a more harmonious understanding of living with water. This means that the 'negative' landscapes might even be more valuable than the positive ones.



49. Portal landscape: abandoned cabin sparking imaginations
 50. Portal landscape: distorted tree sparking imaginations



2.3 portal landscapes (poet's consonance)

Portal landscapes are related to the poet's sublime, regarding a bordering sensation of fluent time and space. In a portal landscape, associations and imaginations across time and space come forward at the same time as a sort of kaleidoscopic flow. This extends the sense of place and sense of self beyond bodily limitations. The bordering sensation is enhanced by a lack of information, structure and order. In the state of poetic consonance, wondrous encounters and appearances seem real. This can be the case in landscapes that resemble mythological scenes. For example, when a tree reminds of ... or when a storm appears to punish human behaviour. When this experience is harmonious, the landscape allows memories and imaginary phenomena to feel as real and vivid as the experience of the actual moment. Landscapes like this can be influenced by rituals like dance and evoking hallucinations. Nowadays, people are eager for the effect of these landscapes and search for it with tourism in search of childhood naivety.

These landscapes offer the opportunity to be the largest gain in meaning possible.

The Biesbosch may contain landscapes that transport the viewer into a flow of associations. During my visit I experienced this when looking at the distorted and crooked trees. These trees reminded me of fairytales of objects coming to life or portals to another world. Another experience was the sense of being almost alone in the creeks while kayaking, which evoked a sense of being on a quest or fantastical journey.



3.4 horrific landscapes (poet's dissonance)

When bordering sensations are not resolved in a balance with the sense of self, the sense of place evolves into a frightening or even horrific experience. Although this experience can be buffered by creating a safe distance, this cannot prevent the experiencer from a potential emotional shock. The inescapable quality of horrific landscapes influences personal confidence and a sense of stability or can even result in permanent trauma.

During my visit to the Biesbosch, I experienced this feeling while being surrounded by flooded areas. I was scared and could only leave the area at certain times due to the connection by ferry. This enhanced the inescapable feeling of the horrific landscape. It also caused a flow of empathy and memories of all the floods the Netherlands had to battle with throughout history and made me better understand the feeling of wanting to protect the country against water and



under water, flooded, crooked, strong

51. Horrific landscape: floodplains with crooked trees, sparking questions of survival and if this is 'supposed to be this way'
52. Horrific landscape: flooded roads limiting freedom to move around





the drive to control water. Besides that, there was a point where I tried to explore the forest a bit more and followed a remnant of a path, but since it was so wet and muddy, I slipped multiple times. I was surrounded by similar-looking trees and I started to lose my orientation.

The state can be induced by understanding the sense of self and creating a situation that cannot be in line with this sense of self. That's why flooding of areas feels so horrific, we are raised with a constant awareness of the possibility that 'the dikes could break' and how terrible the results of that event would be. So, when we sense any phenomenon that might be in line with this danger or and corresponding warning, our sense of self cannot be resolved. It is important to note that designers should be aware of the possibility of causing physiological trauma by creating a bordering state that is not resolved.

53. Map showing accesibility in the Biesbosch:
making clear that it takes effort to reach the
inner areas and it takes effort to leave these areas,
leading to a feeling of isolation

Besides the meaningful landscapes, two types of landscapes avoid any attempt to align with the corresponding sense of self.

3.5 liminal landscapes (state of equanimity)

Landscapes can help with the development of the state of equanimity: a sense of awareness that the small and insignificant hold as much value as the seemingly significant. These landscapes raise the awareness of the creative process of sensations becoming experiences. There are two most prominent ways that landscapes can support this. The first type is landscapes that highlight the continuous change of all things, like tidal landscapes or landscapes during foggy weather. Places like this offer experiences without structure or order. The second type expresses

an intimate connectedness of life processes, like the option of being in a landscape for a considerable time or having to adapt to the surroundings. Or seeing seasonal indicators like traveling birds or blossoming trees. Another way to explain this is by the example of the experience of the flow of events and transformations by carefully observing a piece of paper. This way one becomes aware of the experience of a flow of events and transformations that lead to this paper; the tree that grew from a seed and was cut to be processed into a paper that traveled to this moment.



54. Noticing small processes by being confronted with vegetations from close by
55. misty and humid landscape: creating the feeling of being immersed in the surroundings



Since the Biesbosch is unregulated and therefore overgrown and chaotic, it offers many encounters that encourage a liminal state. There is one place in particular that is designed to show the small tidal changes in the Biesbosch, namely the Wassende Maan. This spiral-shaped land art highlights tidal changes. Furthermore, when roaming the area besides the restriction of pathways. It is moments like this, where you can't see the end of the forests and are immersed in a labyrinth of small branches and misty weather, Although there are already some liminal landscapes present, they are not necessarily located along the route that will be the focus of this design. The transportation by kayak is likely to be quite fast and it seems that the liminal state is more likely to occur when slowing down. Besides that, the architectural intervention could benefit from engaging with the seasonal changes.

56. Wassende maan, Karel Tomeï, n.d.



3.6 Unpresentable landscapes (extinguished state)

Unpresentable landscapes support a resistance to mental or physical sensations. These landscapes stimulate the state of detachment from anything. The state can only be recognized after the experience and this realization changes one's sense of self permanently. The physical form of these landscapes does not matter; it's unrelated to the effect. The state surprises the experiencer with an intense, brief, and sudden bolt of lightning. Landscapes like this are hard or maybe even

impossible to design or predict since they can be encountered anywhere. The only condition is preparation to be able to release any sense of place and sense of self. Physical labour and poetry can support this preparation.

As mentioned, these landscapes can appear anywhere, including the Biesbosch. Although there are no conditions that stimulate the extinguished state, I believe the Biesbosch is a particular place where the state can arise. Its chaotic and dynamic nature, especially during intense weather makes it



57, 58. sudden, powerful and temporary moments in the Biesbosch

an environment where a sudden sensation of detachment can arise. Besides that, as physical labour is needed to navigate this area since many areas are unreachable by car or even bike, this further supports the requirements for an unpresentable landscape. There are almost no places to take shelter or to rest, which demands endurance and stamina. The landscape and the effort required to explore it may enhance the possibility of experiencing a loss of sense of self and sense of place. The design might enhance the opportunity for this state to arise by supporting the physical labour, but also by providing spaces to practice meditative techniques. Additionally, the architecture itself could promote this state by embracing poetic qualities that encourage the loss of self and place.



59. Reeds blurring the transition between land and water
60. Sudden, overwhelming moment where wind and heady clouds are interrupted by a rainbow
61. Fields with reeds



suddenly I lose my sense of self



3.7 Overarching themes

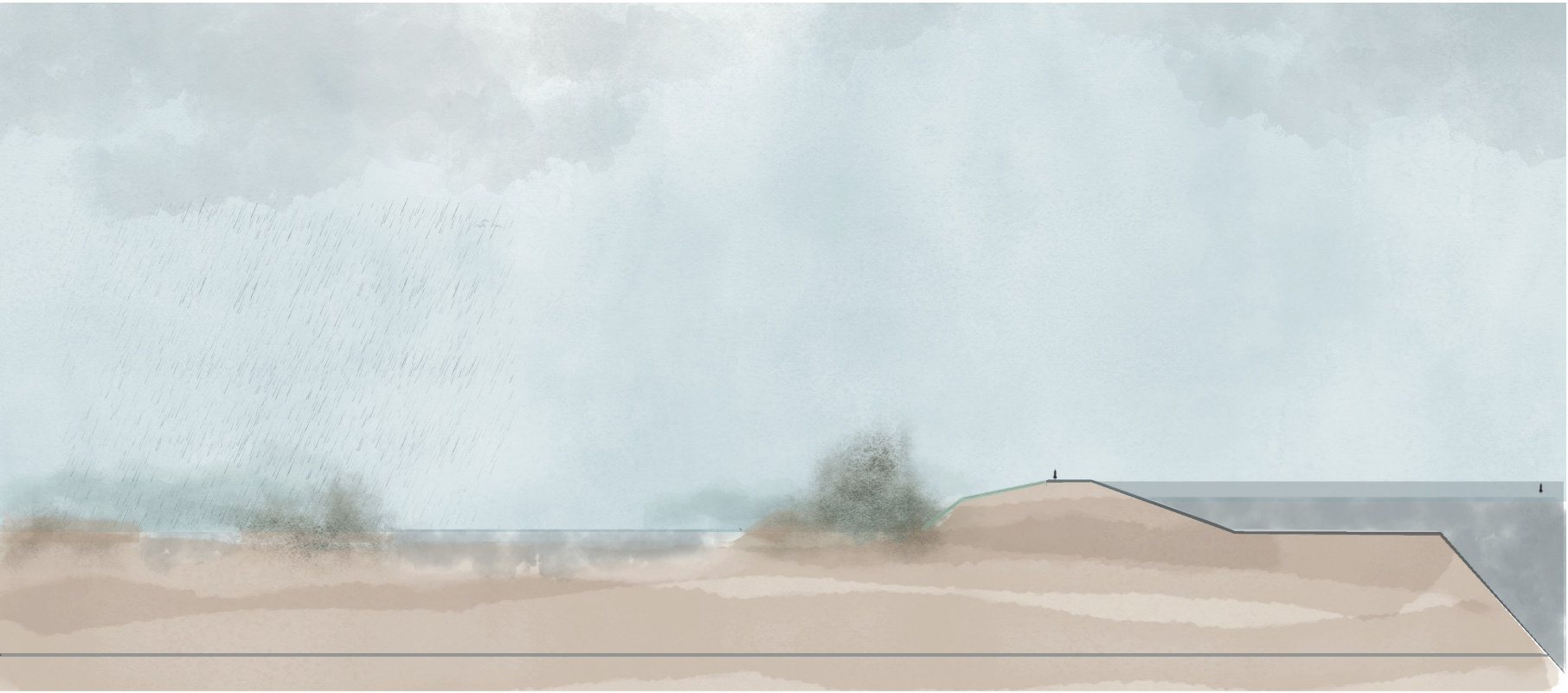
In all of these typologies, some overarching themes influence the experience of the sublime; thresholds, senses and vulnerabilities, natural processes, and memory/time.

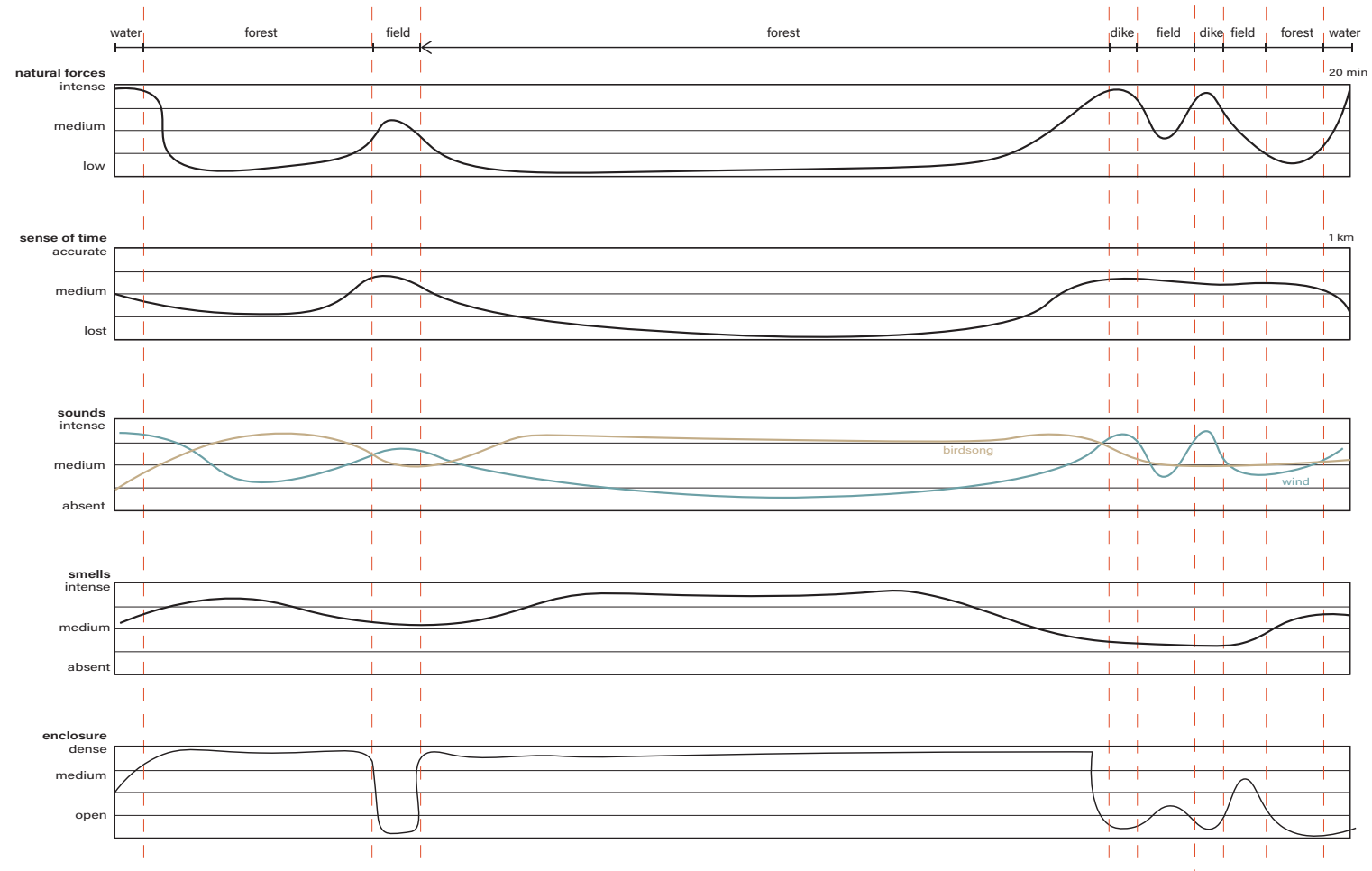
Thresholds

While moving through the Biesbosch, we encounter thresholds – divisions that invite us to pause, step, or transition (Smardon, 2021). These moments invite us to slow down, guide our attention, or raise our awareness. For example, the transition between land and water could be seen as a threshold. Since this is not a strict division, it is interesting to notice where this threshold would be. Are we inclined to stop when our feet get sucked into the ground? Or when the path stops? This is a subjective consideration, but we can assume that most people would follow this path. So, this routing is important for the experience of water in the Biesbosch. Currently, the paths are quite distant from the water and are parallel to the stream. This gives the feeling of going with the flow and being in tune with the stream of the water. Besides that, it deprives a view of the water and sets the attention to the other senses like hearing or touch of humidity or temperature that is affected by the nearby water. The thresholds are affected by natural processes, for example, with the rising of the water, some areas are not reachable anymore. Elements like bridges on the other hand invite us to encounter the water in a different direction while guiding us over the water. At the moment there are almost no places to rest or to have guided thresholds between inside and outside. Implementing this could strengthen the connection with the surroundings.



62. Drawing showing the thresholds towards the water
63. Drawing showing the changes in appearance during different seasons and the influence of vegetation on the experience of the landscape: restriction of view, movement, creation of shelter or shadows etc.
64. Section showing the different heights and types of ground: a clear division between the water reservoirs and the rest of the Biesbosch

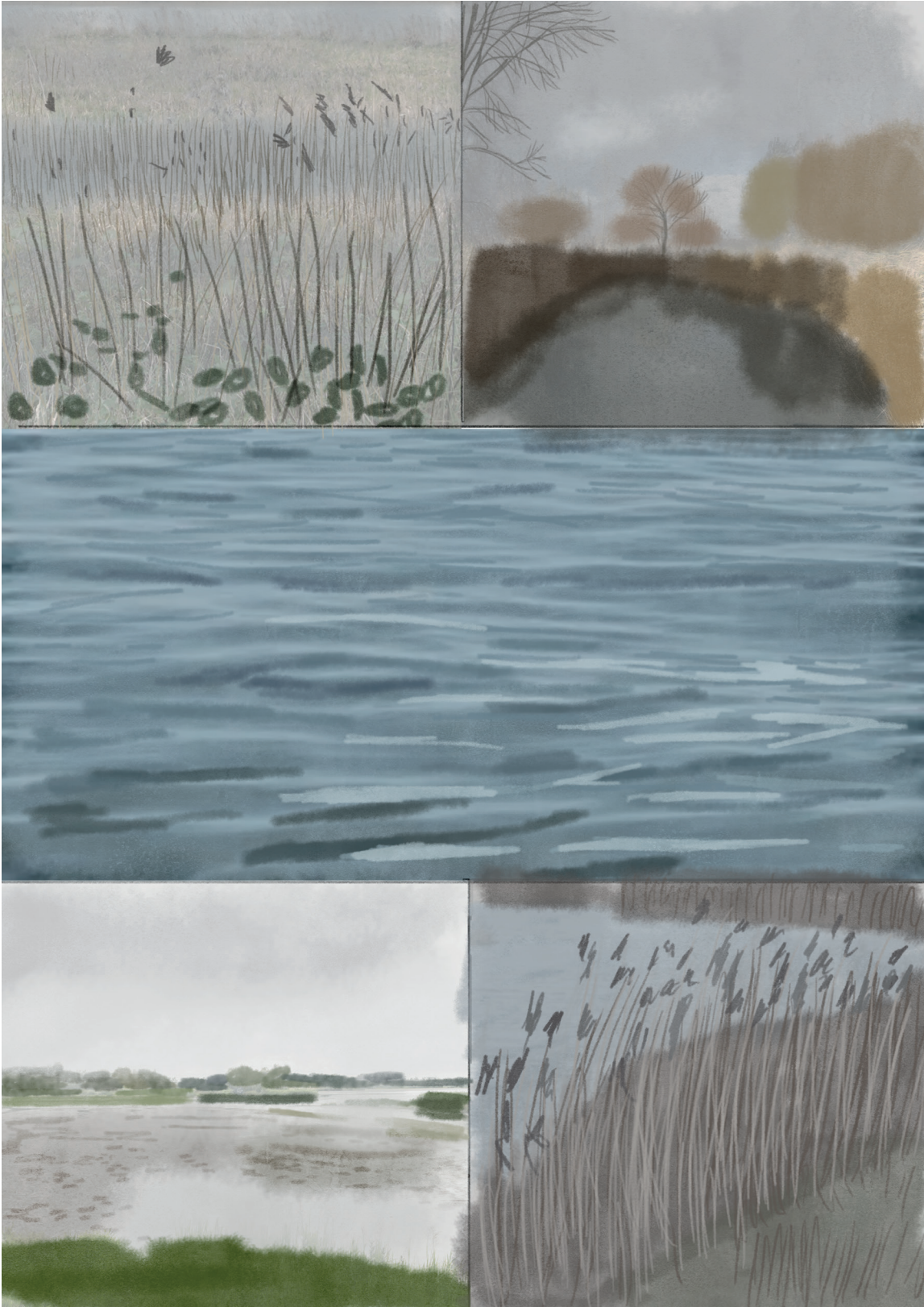




65. Sequences of experiences influenced by the existing landscapes

66. Impression of the forest, dense vegetation with different tones of green, but not very diverse, it is hard to find a way through this 'jungle'





Senses and vulnerabilty

How intensely we experience the senses is influenced by the amount of shelter our surroundings offer. Without shelter, we are unprotected and vulnerable to experience senses. While architecture can frame or direct the experience of the senses, a lack of this can cause us to be overwhelmed and confused about where to set our attention. A design can guide light, isolate input from outside, regulate temperature, and so on. In the Biesbosch there is a lack of shelter, the only shelter there are trees and dikes that can protect from winds and a bit from rain. The shape of the Biesbosch in itself influences and produces sensory experience: The wilderness of the Biesbosch places us in a different world of senses than we are used to. Here, we have no buildings to protect us from heavy winds. There are no distracting sounds. The sensorial experience guides us and makes us understand our surroundings. When we hear the wind through reeds, we know they grow near water and this tells us that water is near. Even if we can't see it. This makes us prone to other senses:

67. Sequence of different landscapes: showing the variety and dynamics of the Biesbosch

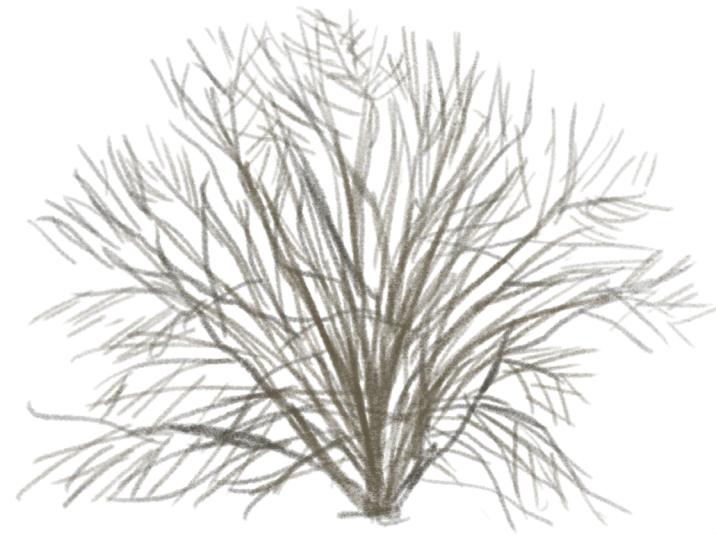
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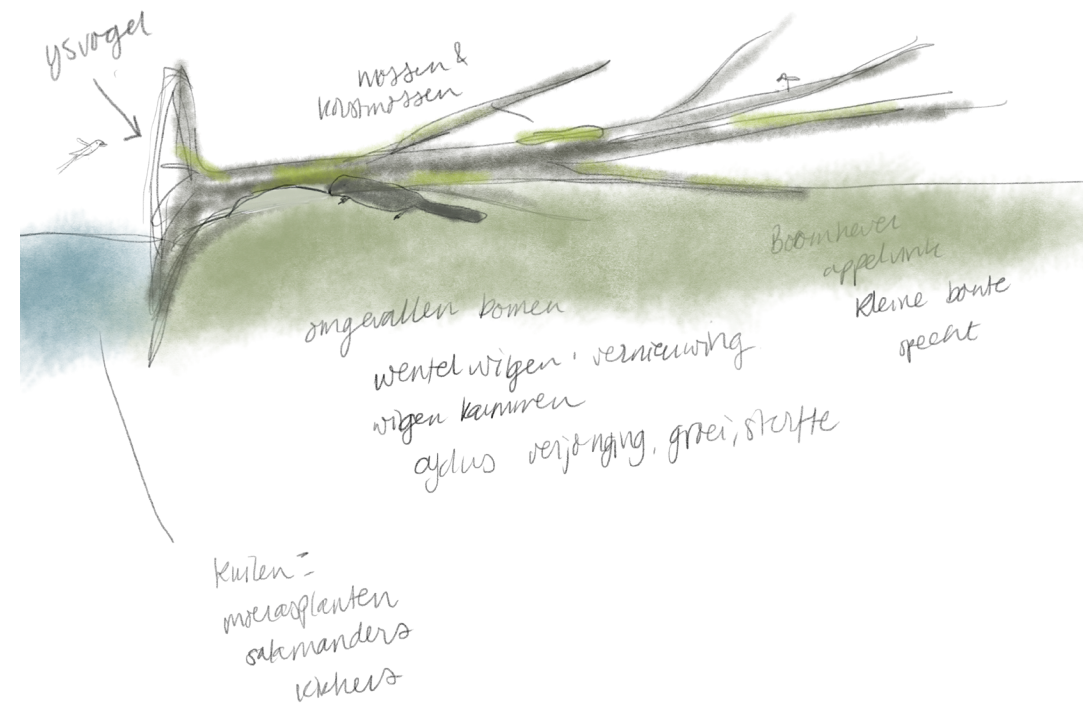
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65. Sequences of experiences influenced by the existing landscapes

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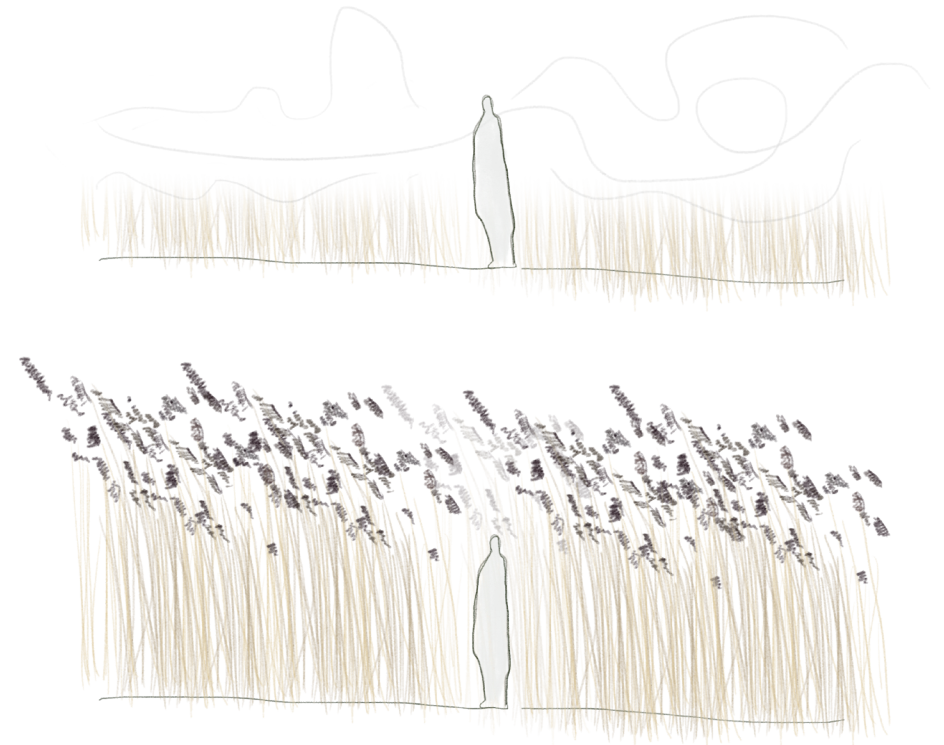


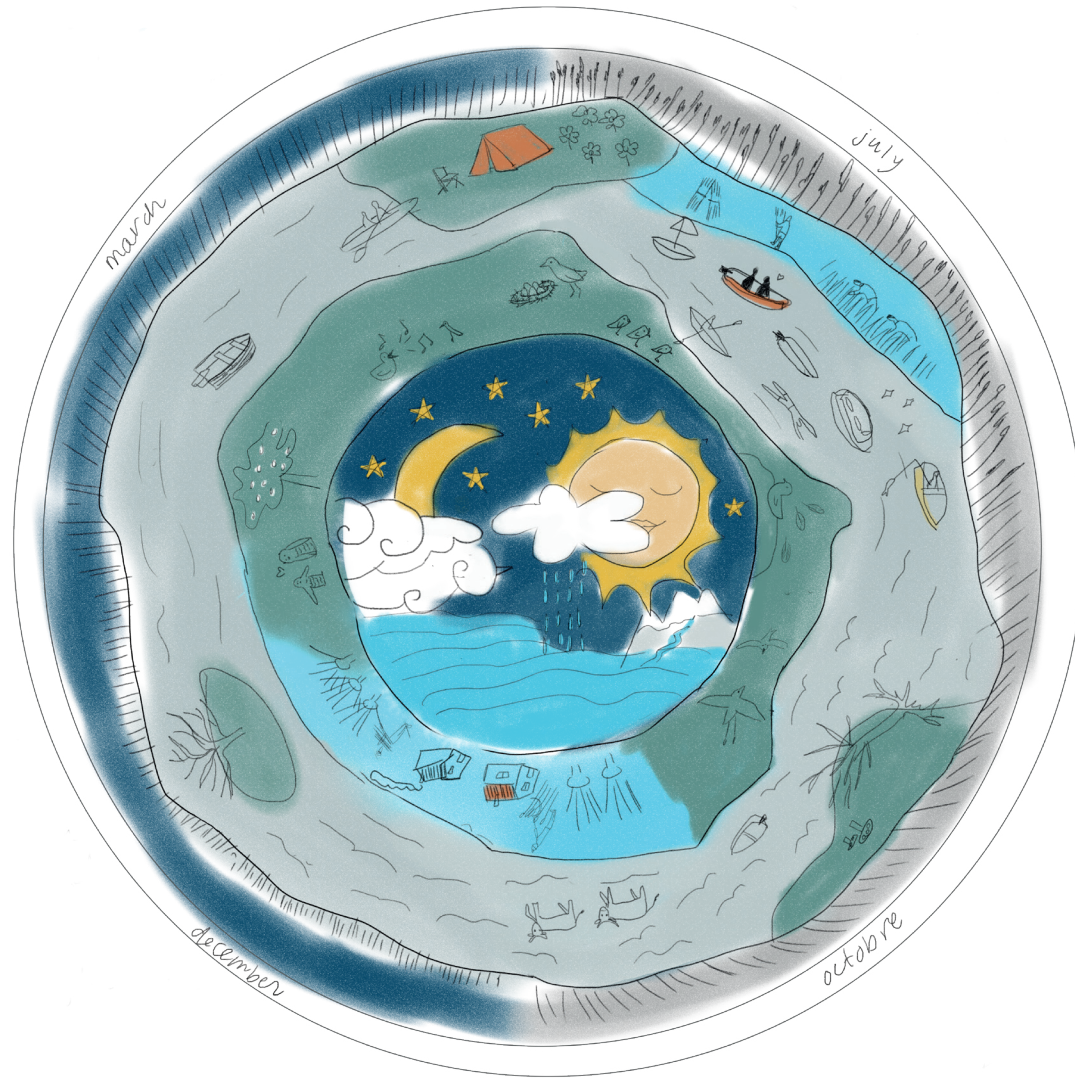
schiet wilg
 schuim en schuimplaats
 voor vee
 uitgebreid wortelstelsel
 → niet snel omwaaien
 kan goed tegen water
 over-hollandse boom
 oerbossen
 dynamische oever
 slijden inhoudt ges.
 beïnvloed stroomsterkte
 → sedimentatie
 25 meter hoog



Natural processes

The experience of water in the Biesbosch is heavily influenced by the dynamic quality of the natural processes. There are recurring rhythms during different timeframes like a day, week, month, season, and year. For example, during the day, the sun's path changes, which can influence the experience by a sense of orientation, warmth, or cold due to sunlight or shadow. Even while staying in the same location, you would continuously have different experiences. Patterns of human activity are often influenced by these rhythms, although it seems like this relationship is growing apart.





Until the 50s of the twentieth century, there was a big activity of biesen, reed, and griend workers in the Biesbosch (IVN, 2019). Since they were reliant on the tidal changes, they would also work during the night. The harvest season started from the first frost in November until April, during the summer the harvested products would be cleaned and made ready for production. During the week, they would stay and sleep in little houses in the Biesbosch and only on Sunday did they return to their families. During this period in time, the Biesbosch was crowded during winter and abandoned in summer. In contrast with the current pattern, where the summer is crowded and the winter is

abandoned. The function of this area has experienced a shift from production to recreation. After their craftsmanship disappeared, the rhythmical connection is felt less.

Besides the cyclical processes, linear processes, like decay are also interesting to engage with. Concerning the design, it includes thinking about the possible ruins that remain after centuries of use.

71. Calendar of the Biesbosch, showing different activities of humans, animals and changing vegetations throughout the day, months and seasons

4. Sublime design: a transformative journey

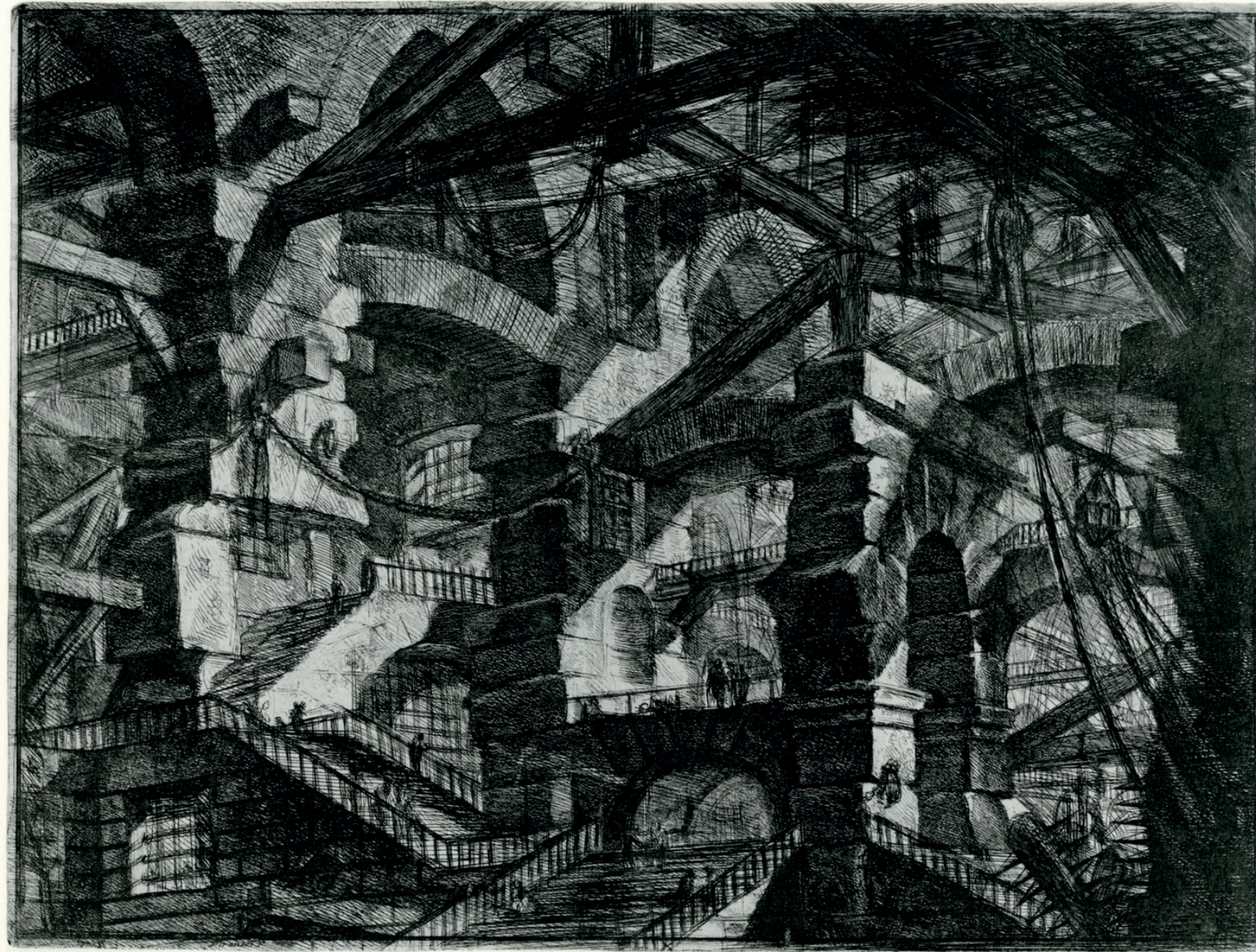
specifically the Biesbosch we can now relate these findings to the design. In addition, case studies with water-related architectural projects help inform the design with possible solutions and experiences while also placing the design in reference to a long tradition of building with water. This will show the position of the design in the current view of water-related architecture.

To accomplish a sublime experience, it is best to include all six types of landscapes. Some are not reachable or experienced at the moment, others can be created with architectural interventions. Furthermore, to accommodate a sublime experience, the design should embrace the dual nature of water as concluded in chapter two. It is precisely this contradiction that stimulates a sublime feeling when encountering water: we are enchanted by it yet we are always aware of its destructive power. Against popular belief, the design should not strive to be as comfortable as possible.



72. Habit-breaking creative journey that influences sensations of water and engages with rhythms, processes and materials of the Biesbosch

73. Impression of journey through the Biesbosch and the impact of turns and spirals for the movement, orientation and views and therefore experience of the surroundings



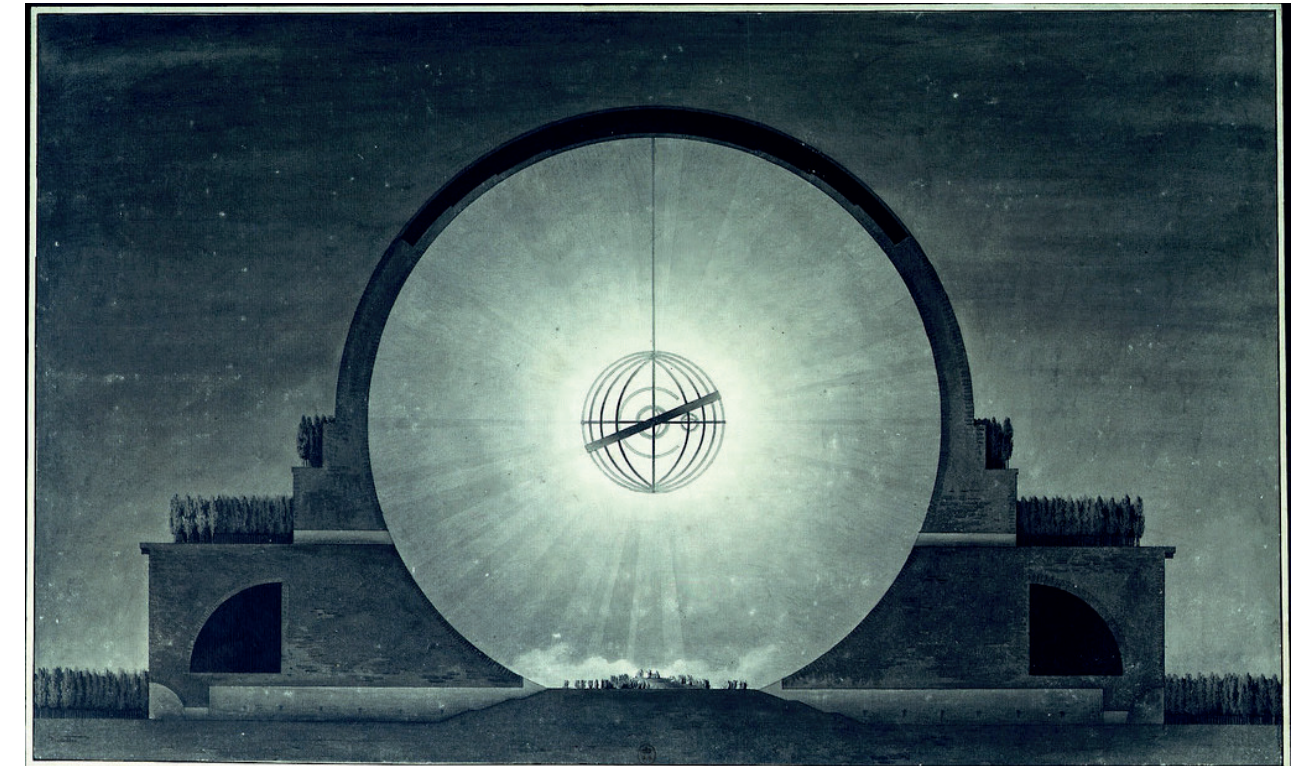
State III

74. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *The Gothic Arch*, early 1770s
 75. E. Boullée, *The Cenotaph for Newton*, 1784

4.1 Sublime architecture

The most notable and known architectural predecessors of an attempt at the sublime are C.N. Ledoux and E.L. Boullée (Nesbitt, 1995). Their designs were an attempt to move away from the central role of God and place science in the center of impressive buildings. In their works, themes like scale, monumentality, and light are used to evoke the sublime. Etienne-Louis Boullée's work

remains unbuilt but is described as an 'architecture of shadows' and is influenced by the terrifying events of the French Revolution. Plans for the National Library show this with the minimal palette and the endless repetition of elements, inducing a sense of power. In line with this, Ledoux's designs included rigid and sober façade and pure geometry. His architecture was in a strong relationship with the function of the building, like prisons that should evoke fear.



76. Image of the St. Benedictusberg abbey designed by Dom Hans van der Laan, Jeroen Verrecht



4.2 Reader's sublime

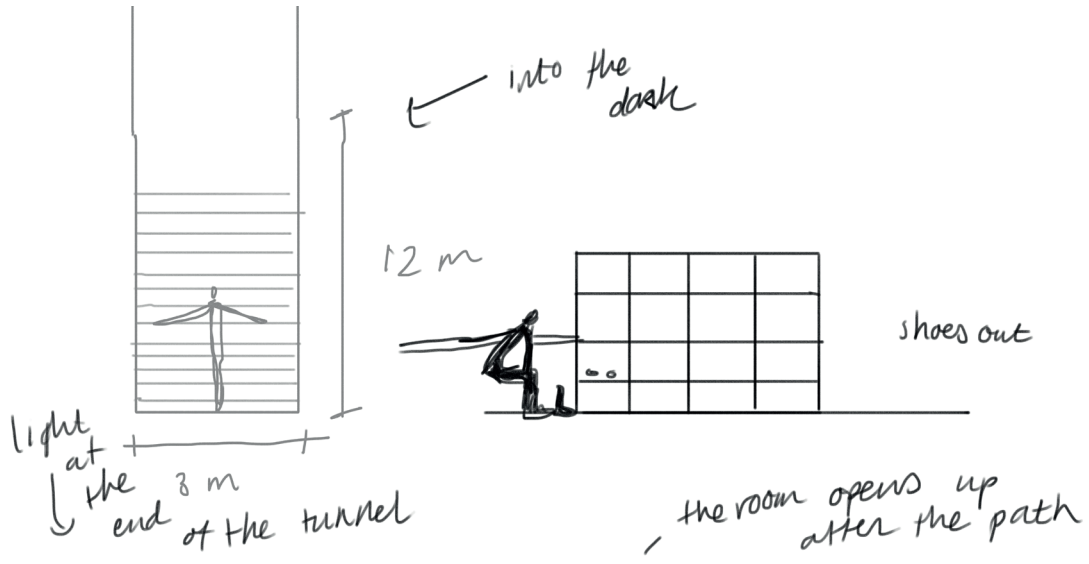
To attain a reader's sublime, one must engage with an existing sense of self. This became clear in chapter two and already presented some examples of symbols that are associated with water: healing and purification are physically represented in a well. The perspective of paradise and the source of life in gardens that resemble Eden and fountains that represent the source of life.

To accomplish a sublime sensation, it is also possible to associate the design with spiritual symbols, inducing a sense of sacredness and placing the design in a position that is in line with our long line of traditions in spirituality. Physical representations include the presence of a sequence: entrance, path, room, towers that reach to higher divinity, or more ancient: monoliths that search for a connection with

cosmic patterns.

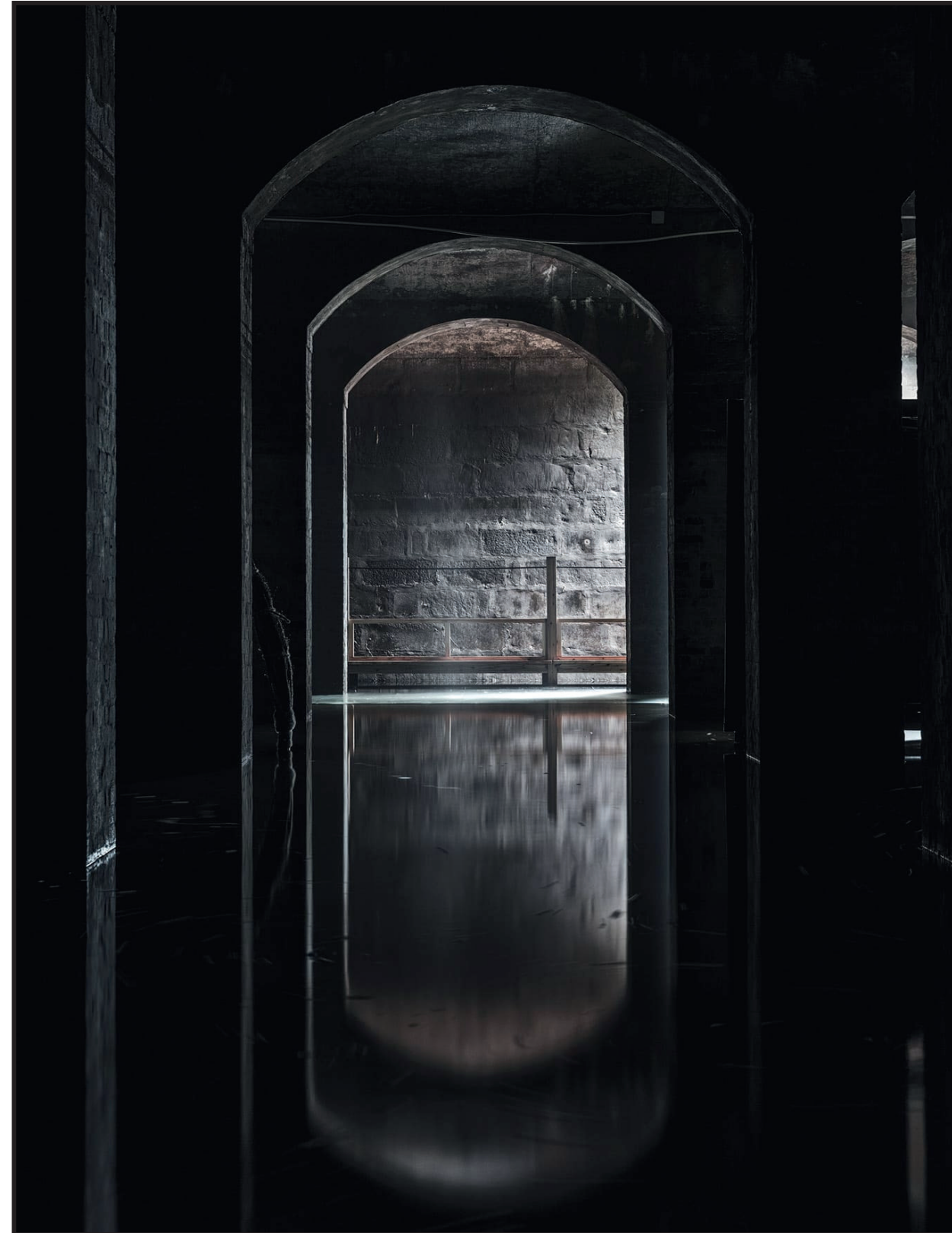
Examples of buildings that express the reader's sublime are the works of the priest Dom Hans van der Laan (Voet, 2019). With his design, he wanted to make nature, as God's creature, fathomable through order. He saw architecture as a way to make our environment readable and saw inhibiting as being able to measure a space and therefore start a relationship with it. We recognize this for instance in his design for the St. Benedictusberg Abbey.

77. Body and space in the temple, a close proximity to the walls, affordances to take of shoes and the transition between hallways and the final room



An example of architecture of neglected landscapes is the installation of Hiroshi Sambuichi in the Cisterne in Copenhagen. The underground reservoir was built to store fresh drinking water for the city, but in 1933 it lost its function and in 1996 became an exhibition space. Sambuichi brought the water back to the cistern and used natural light to create an immersive experience in this subterranean landscape. This exhibition makes an abandoned place accessible again and Sambuichi almost gives the original purpose a second, more poetic chance. The creation of openings allows light to come in beautiful reflections that stand out in contrast to the vast darkness. Along the route, you encounter different installations, including a glass box that shows the evaporation of moss, a Japanese wooden bath, and bridges. (Frederiksborgmuseerne, 2021)

Scarpa Brion cemetery is rich in symbolic references (Beltramini, Zannier, 2006). Elements like the sign for infinity are more recognizable whereas the symbolic value of a connected waterway is more implicit. This waterway references the journey of life (McCarter, 2013), fitting the program of the building.



78. Image of Cisterne Copenhagen designed by Hiroshi Sambuichi, Rasmus Hjortshøj, 2017

4.3 Poet's sublime

To attain a poet's sublime, one must evoke a stream of associations from an existing sense of self. This sense of self became clear in chapter two and already presented some examples of symbols that are associated with water: healing and purification are physically represented in a well. The perspective of paradise and the source of life in gardens that resemble Eden and fountains that represent the source of life. More mythical and therefore poetical aspects of the sense of self are examples like the Witte wieven, sacrifices in wetlands, mythological trees, seemingly divine clearings, and pools in forests or abandoned houses.

Besides referring to these elusive symbols, there are architectural means to attain this bordering state. The most important one is multisensory design to create an immersive experience.

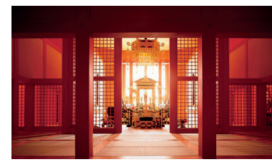
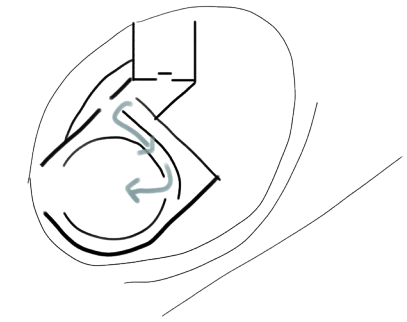
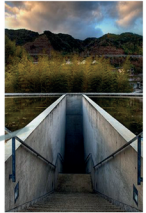
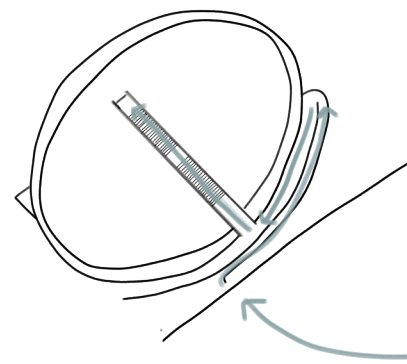
Peter Zumthor did this beautifully in his design for Therme Vals (Hawkes, 2007). Therme Vals combines the elements of heat, light, and sound in unconventional combinations to create an immersive experience, stimulating all senses. As a visitor, you arrive deep in the mountain and progress through changing environments to the more open rooms. You first pass through dark hardwood changing rooms followed by a gallery and a stepped ramp leading towards the central pool. The bather encounters various atmospheres, varying



79. The hallway towards the Therme in Vals, showing the patina of the water that runs freely over the walls and the atmosphere

80. View in the therme, the humidity softens the perception and makes you continuously connected with water. The baths are lighter and more blue than the transition space

81. Floorplan of the Therme, showing the layout of hollow blocks and a transition between a guided path and a free transition space



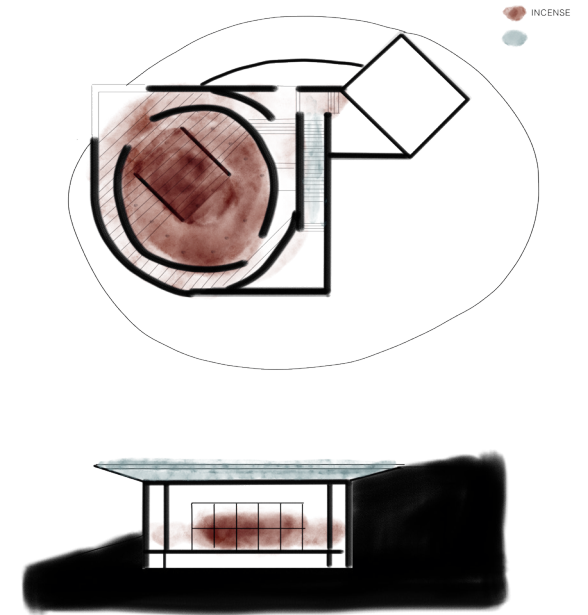
in temperature, humidity, luminosity, scent, and sound. The water as well as the acoustic varies throughout the different spaces in the building. The water differs in size, temperature, lighting, and smell. The acoustics are manipulated by orthogonal geometry. The appearance of the building invites silence or in the case of the spring grotto, humming or singing. Zumthor also speaks of a state while designing that resembles the bordering state: 'I have to get into all the possible qualities which could be brought, which arise within me, out of my memory, experiences, fantasies, and images, to generate this building.' (ibid, p.212). The change of time is also included in the design, as the transition between natural to artificial light is used to the advantage of atmospheric quality. The primary lighting comes from lighting in the pools, carefully

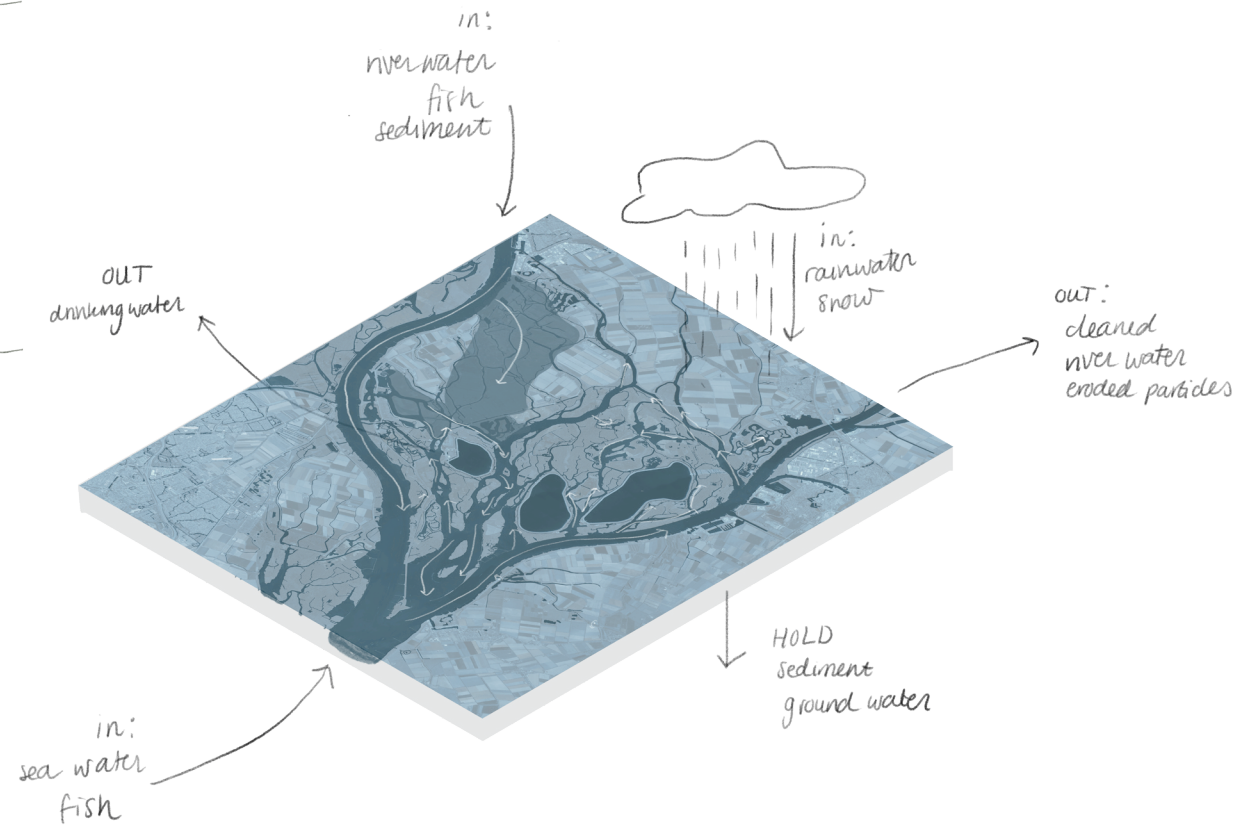
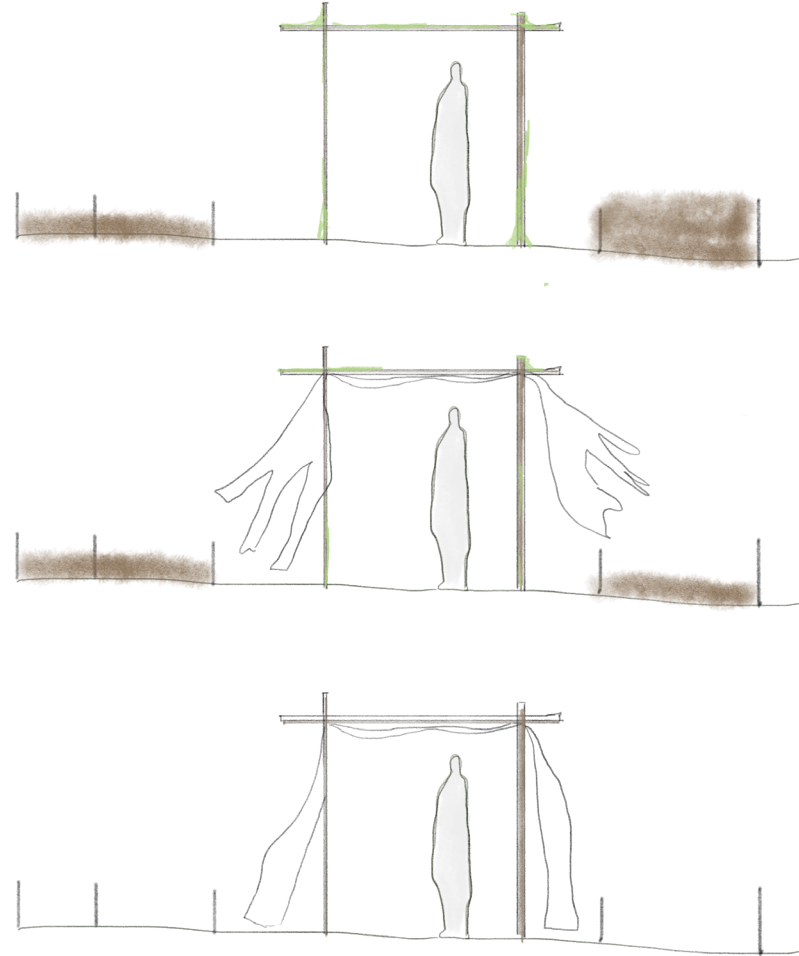
recessed below the water which transforms this into beautiful shades. Reflected by the steam from the water. Tadao Ando did something similar with his Temple of Water, (Ando & Fernández-Galiano, 2022). He applies symbols that trigger our imagination and help to transition from the 'profane' world to the sacred. For example, before encountering the massive pool on top of the temple, the visitor is led through a labyrinth of high concrete walls, limiting the perception of the immediate surroundings. After that, a central and symmetrical staircase sinks into the water, allowing encounters on different relation to eye height. This is a breaking of our habitual relationship with water, as we never encounter water this way, and sparks a sense of being transported in an underwater world. Yet again the visitor is surprised to arrive in a completely red room made

with wood instead of concrete, contrasting with our visions of water. Ando also breaks with the tradition of Japanese temple architecture. While Ando and Zumthor break with conventional standards of architectural environments, they still strive to be in harmony with the existing sense of self. NOX architects go a step further with the design of the h20 expo. This design uses technology to create a reactive environment that takes over the experience of the visitor (Hidden Architecture, 2019). The floors turn into walls and are uneven and slippery. Mist prohibits the sense of orientation, urging the experienter to trust other senses. Other artificial uses of water include the freezing of a wall, artificial rainfall, and jumping jets, many controlled by sensors. These sensors might add to a feeling of control, but when other visitors are under control

82. Routing of the Temple of water by Tadao Ando, showing the path of transition from the profane to the sacred by a change of outside-inside, materials, light and senses

83. Scents of the Temple of water, first the smell of water will come nearer, until you follow the staircase and the pungent smell of incense will take over





it might still be experienced as frightening. The building is completely shut off from the surroundings so the experience is entirely controlled by the design of the architecture. The building evokes a feeling of being underwater during a storm. This way creates a horrific landscape.

4.4 Uncompromised sublime

As mentioned, it is harder to accommodate a design that stimulates a state of equanimity and in which the sense of self and place are resisted. However, there are examples of architectural interventions that have given it a try. Zen gardens are rooted in Buddhist practices and are therefore the most direct examples of liminal-inducing architectures. But closer to home there are also examples, like the Museum Querini Stampalia Foundation by Carlo Scarpa. For this design, Scarpa was asked to deal with the problems of flooding. Instead, he took a stance in including the flooding in the building rather than resisting it. In the final design, a staircase leads towards the water, not only making the water accessible and even guiding the visitor towards it but also showing the changes in height. Furthermore, the water from the canal is led through a maze into a pond in the courtyard. Beautifully connecting the rooms inside and outside. The water temple also evokes the experience of an uncompromised sublime, which is not surprising as it is used as a Buddhist temple. The pool shows the changes in time, the rooms allow for meditation and there is a certain effort needed before entering the deepest and most sacred room. Besides occupying a neglected landscape, Sambuichi's philosophy engages strongly with so-called 'moving materials'— sun, wind, and water.

84. Expression of the possible influence of natural processes on the physical quality of the design: growth and decay

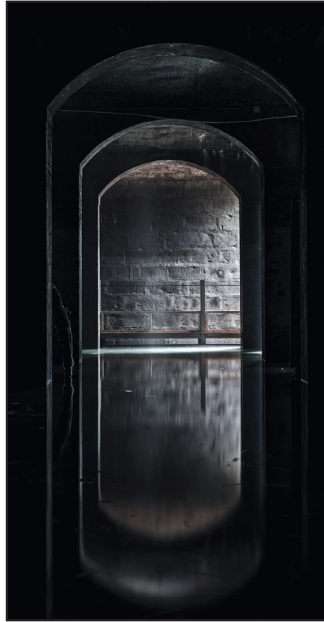
85. Analysis of the flows in the Biesbosch, which could be included in the materiality or the disruption of these flows

creative journey: design

legible landscapes



neglected landscapes



portal landscapes



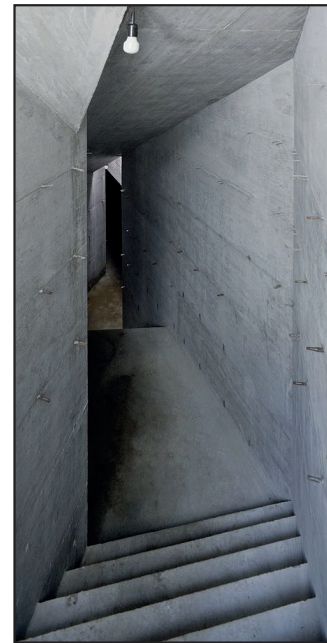
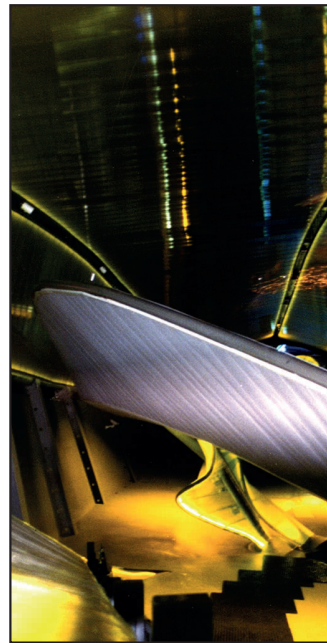
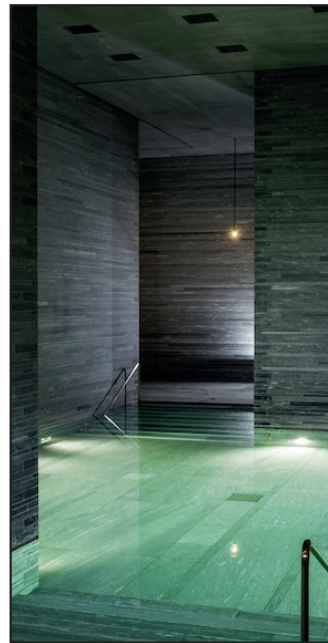
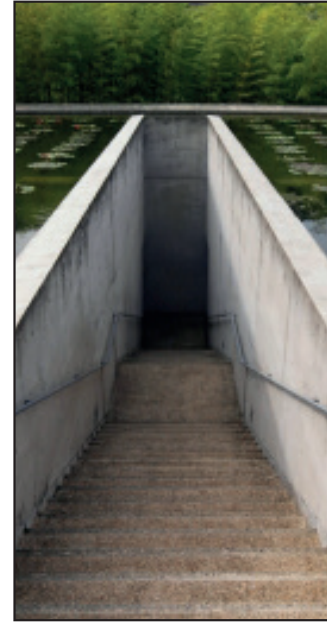
horrific landscape



liminal landscapes



unpresentable landscapes

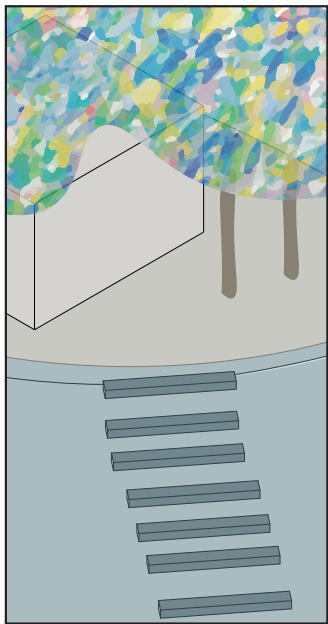


So, many buildings that incorporate water in the design are prone to evoke the sublime. And what we also see in these case studies, is a subtle alternation between multiple landscapes. Many buildings are balancing symbols with the disruption of this and using readers sublime in combination with poet's or liminal sublime. I think that it is in the alternation and sequence of these different sensations, that a richer and more meaningful experience can arise.

86. Overview of architectural translation of the six shades of the sublime, a.o. Dom hans van der laan, Aldo van Eyck, Hiroshi Sambuichi, Tadao Ando, NOX architects, Carlo Scarpa, Peter Zumthor,

use architectural qualities and elements to connect to the meaning of water with experience

engaging with floods



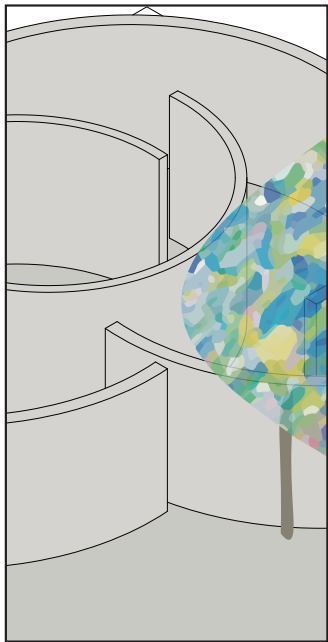
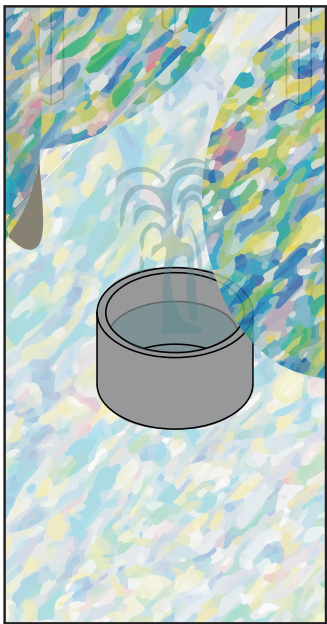
garden



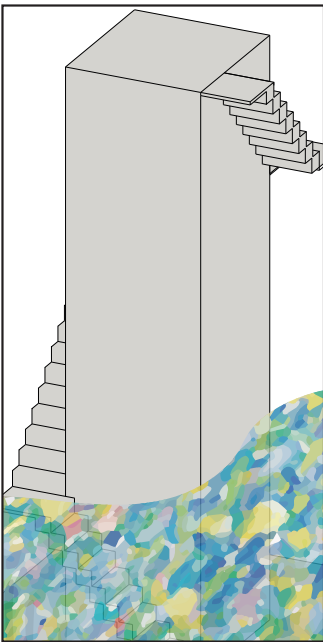
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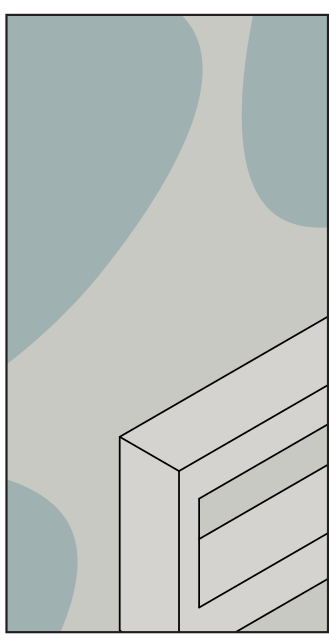
refuge



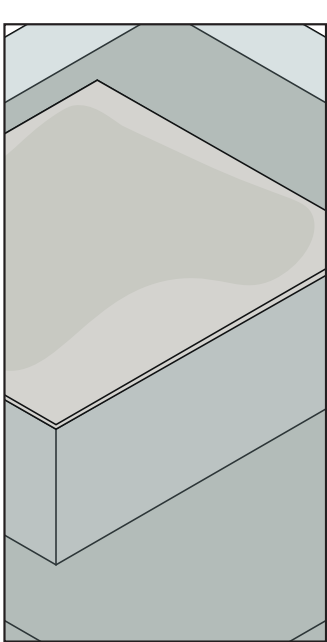
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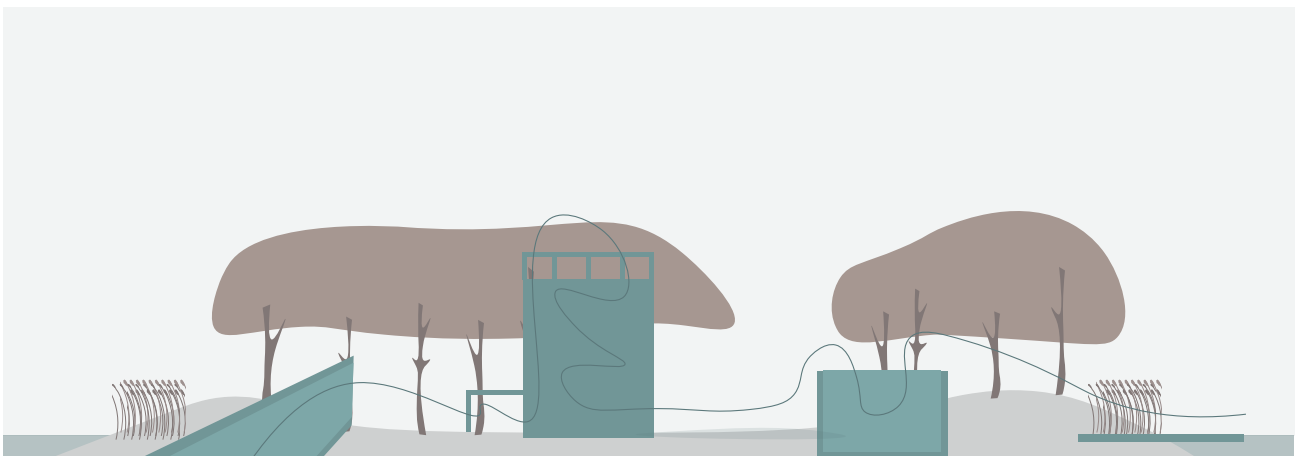
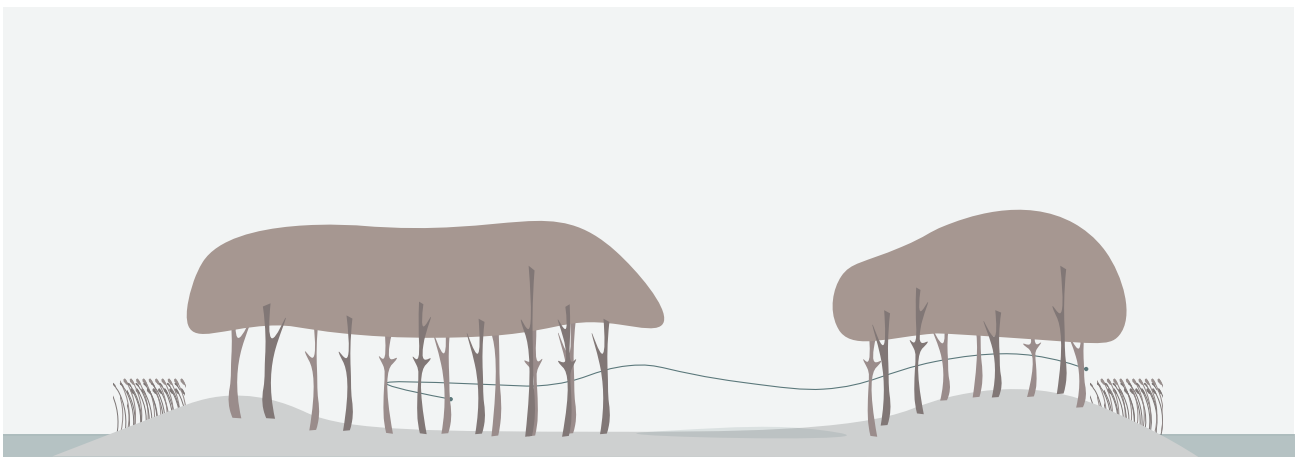
viewpoint



highlight



showing processes



87. Overview of the translation of the found themes of sense of self into architectural implications
88. Impression of the influence of architectural intervention in the interaction with the environment

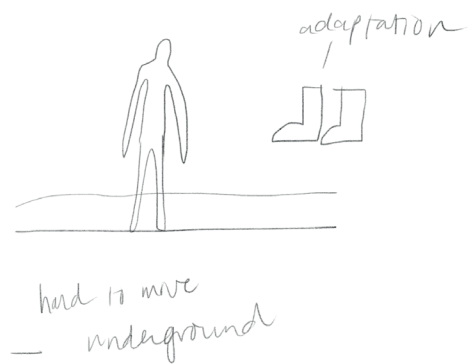
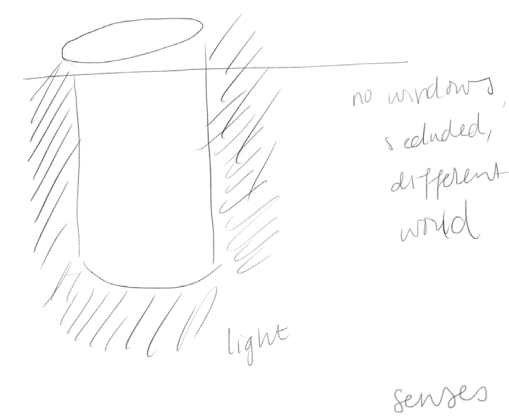
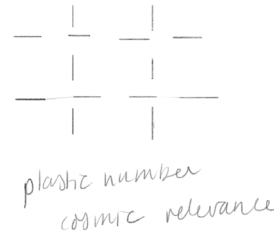
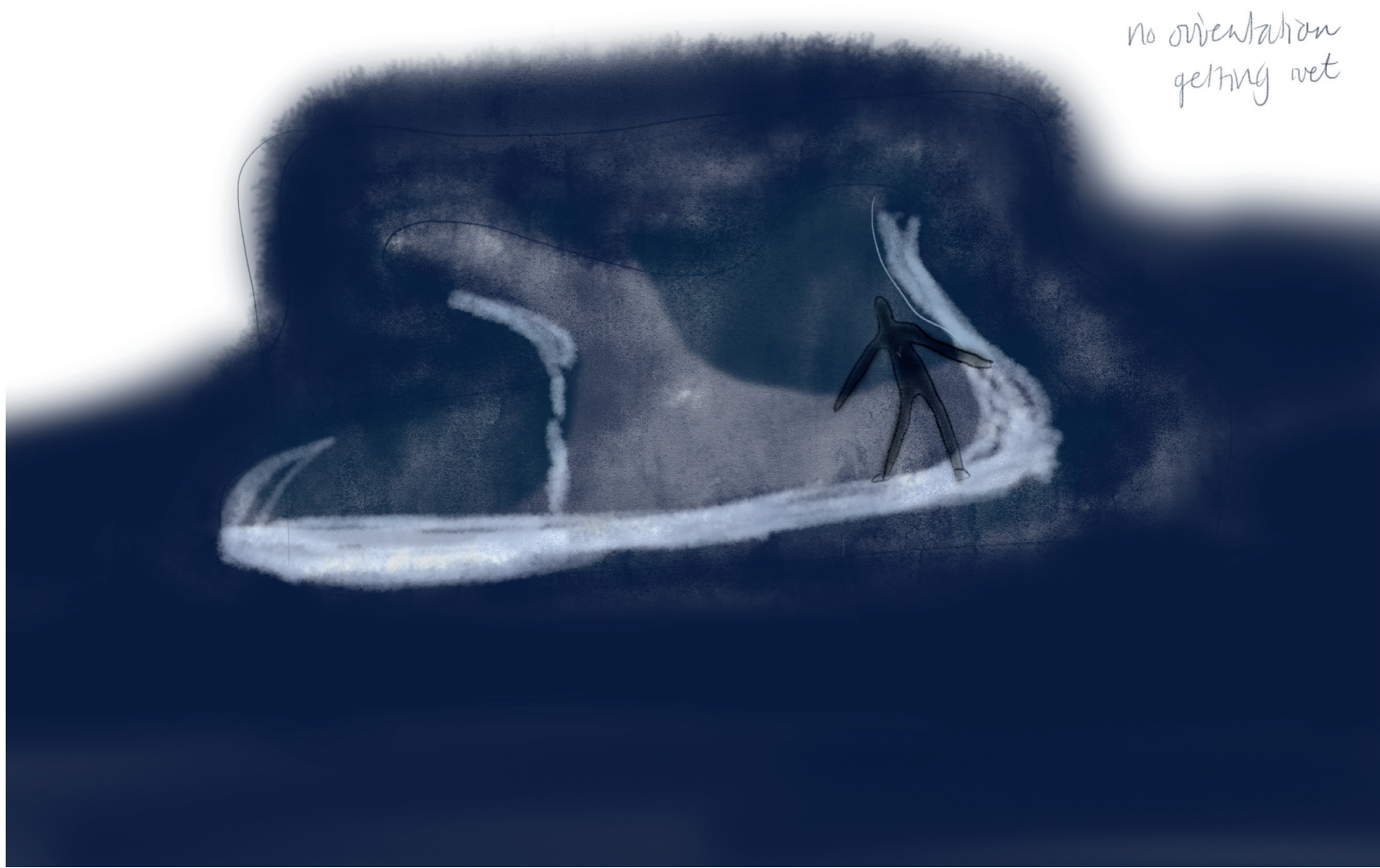


89. Impression of architectural intervention with walls near the border

90. Impression of the implication of mirrors in water, inducing a disoriented state

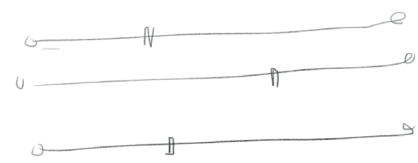


- 91. Impression of architectural intervention which makes the water more accessible and turns the focus towards the water
- 92. Sketches of possible smaller interventions which experiment with the proximity to water and habit breaking movements of the body
- 93. Experiment with the elimination of a view, to highlight other senses which are more often overlooked by architects



guided
vs free

seeming contradictions



sweet spot

other world

94. Sketch with attention to disorientation and immersive experience
95. Exploration of guiding themes

CONCLUSION

Nature-based spirituality is on the rise, but this has not yet resulted in a concurrent development of architecture. In support of this development, it is valuable to research how secular architecture can evoke spiritual experiences. Simultaneously, nature is getting more room. Projects like Room for the River (Feddes et al., 2017) show how free water can create stimulating environments that not only support practical objectives but also attain sensorial experiences that have the potential to deepen our connection with water and create meaningful experiences.

This research analyses the development of a sublime experience, existing meanings of water in the Netherlands and the experience of the sublime relating to water to attain a better understanding of the material and immaterial values of water and eventually learn how architecture can deepen the connection with water and spirituality. After centuries of fighting the water in the Netherlands, water is finally given more space to flow in its natural course. This presents opportunities for

nature-based spirituality, going beyond institutionalized religion. Currently, projects are primarily focused on practical objectives like preventing floods. However, there is potential to develop ways to engage with the emergence of water-oriented places, deepening our relationship with this uncontrolled water and creating meaningful experiences. This study delves into the tangible and intangible values of water in the Netherlands to attain a better understanding of how architectural design can help deepen the spiritual connection with water. Since the sublime revives as God withdraws from the experience of men (Roncken, 2020) and it explains the enchanting power of water, this could serve as a starting point for this research. A sublime experience starts with a sudden and powerful break of a habitual interaction between a sense of self and a sense of place. This can be in a way that is rooted in existing signs (reader's) or in a way that creates a bordering state that not only includes signs, but associations beyond the limits of time and space (poet's). This is then either resolved in harmony with a sense of self (consonant) or remains disrupted

(dissonant). These four types are still problematic in the sense that the resolving imagination disrupts the 'pure' experience of interacting with the Greatness. Two uncompromised types of sublime resist this creative act and aim for a state of equanimity: the resistance of making sense of things. The unrepresentable state is in fact a prolonged liminal state in which a sense of self and place are completely extinguished.

Water has many meanings, both negative and positive. In artworks throughout time, it is often depicted as a source for life, bringing prosperity and vitality. Physical representations of these qualities, in symbols, are elements like fountains or wells. In the Netherlands, water has been seen as a threat and many people still fear the damage floods can bring, especially with rising sea levels (Mostert, 2020). These contradictive associations of water are also what makes this element so fascinating. This is rooted in the feeling of the sublime: a disturbing experience which is both terrifying and pleasurable in the face of greatness.

My visit to the Biesbosch made clear that marshes evoke spiritual feelings. The dynamic nature of this area heightens the senses and makes you feel connected to the water and a larger whole. Several aspects contribute to this, such as the wind through the reeds, the reflection of the water, the soft borders, and more. Yet there are also possibilities to enhance this experience and to stimulate a more active engagement with the water. For the design, the wetness and muddiness should be maintained. The design should not aim to be dry and safe but should sit low in the water and not shy away from these ‘inconvenient’ characteristics.

An analysis of water-related case studies in relation to the shades of the sublime, sense of self and the sense of place in the Biesbosch made clear that the architecture should be a disruptive journey along varying landscapes. By applying principles from the reader’s, poet’s and uncompromised landscapes, the design will be rich in experience. Architecture can enhance the reader’s sublime by referring to symbolic meaning of water, but also evoke a serene feeling by referring to spiritual symbols. An example of this is the use of thresholds to make the visitor aware of entering a new world and journey and highlighting the transition between the ordinary and the

sacred. The poet’s sublime can be induced by stimulating the senses and referring to symbols that stimulate a bordering state of associations and imaginations. The stimulation of the senses makes you connect with the space and feel part of something larger than yourself. Lastly, the most difficult sublime to design: uncompromised sublime. To enhance this state, a design can highlight small changes in the landscape, like the tides or seasonal changes. And as the unrepresentable state is stimulated by effort and labour, the journey should be physically challenging for the visitor. At the end of the journey, you should feel deeply connected with water that transcends time and space.

REFLECTION

Over the course of this graduation, I explored the topic of the spirituality of water. Considering the vague and boundless nature of this concept, planning and structure of research in this topic are difficult yet important to maintain. The choice for Explore Lab, with much freedom in choosing methods, topics and programme, makes it even more important to hold on to a structured approach. By combining theory with more creative approaches, I have found a way to incorporate structure while retaining vulnerability to the ambiguity of spirituality.

The flexibility of this studio also allowed me to follow with my interest in Landscape Architecture. This interdisciplinary approach helped me to root my design in its surroundings and to understand processes like the ‘moving materials’, including sedimentation, sun, water, and wind to make my design participate in the complex and constantly changing site conditions.

Finding a focus
Considering the undefinable nature of the concept of spirituality, it needs to be approached from a specific perspective. To address this, I focused on the Dutch landscape and its corresponding mentality: the control of the water. Since water is feared in the Netherlands but remains a source for fascination, the research searches for a way to break with the current distance between human and water and seeks to find ways for architectural interventions to enhance the experience of the spiritual values of water. I applied multiple methods to answer this problem: researching literature, case studies, works of art, mapping, and fieldwork. The combination of these methods offers an extensive understanding of the spiritual experience of water in the Netherlands and of my design location – the Biesbosch. Together, the methods result in a comprehensive answer to the research question, which resulted in a meaningful design.

The concept of Sublime
From the literature study it became clear that the concept of the sublime is a valuable perspective to explore the spirituality of water in the Netherlands. The sublime shows that the combination of negative and positive associations of water can result in an overwhelming yet meaningful experience. Since a sublime experience evokes a transcendent feeling and a connection to something greater than oneself, it allows spirituality outside institutionalised religion. This concept helped me to develop

a theoretical framework that was already related to design and landscape, limiting the perspective of my research on spirituality that otherwise would become too open and extended to grasp within the scope of this research.
Furthermore, during the entire process, my tutors stimulated me to connect research with design. This helped me to continuously evaluate my findings in relation to the design. Researching artworks and literature showed values like transition which could instantly be related to

physical applications like wells and fountains or ways to design thresholds between spaces and inside and outside. Fieldwork showed ways in which the landscape already stimulated a sublime experience and which aspects could be enhanced with architectural intervention. This way, the tutoring helped me to design a building that could be experienced as ‘sublime’ by most people, engaging the user with the natural processes, ‘lack of comfort’, and detachment of the urban, while being in line with the sense of self of the visitors and the specific context of the Biesbosch.

Multidisciplinary approach
The structure of sublime (theory), senses (fieldwork), and meaning (artworks) combined to inform architecture (case studies) flows smoothly and includes a multidisciplinary approach. Following this approach helps to understand and map immaterial values, like the sense of self or the sensory experience which informs the sense of place.

Furthermore, fieldwork, artwork, and drawing are intuitive ways of understanding that provoke creativity. By visiting the site, all the senses are engaged, and it helps to immediately relate the theory to the design. The literature offers academic input that supports evidence-based design and introduces new concepts to explore. This is needed to achieve meaningful architecture that enriches the experience of our surroundings.

The academic values of the research and design
The academic value lies in the unacademic nature of the research. The concept of spirituality is personal and hard to define, so only including a scientific approach is not sufficient. By searching beyond the boundaries of academic research, I have aimed to include intangible and ungraspable values. This topic has great social value, since increasingly more people struggle with the institutionalized nature of religion yet have the need to be spiritually engaged. There are not many architectural projects that focus on this secular spirituality, which shows a gap that my research and design aims to fill. Furthermore, the appreciation of aesthetics relating to the sublime broadens our appreciation of new surroundings and makes the making of meaning possible. Yet, it is important to note that designers should be aware of the psychological impact the sublime can have.

Other designers can apply the outcomes of this research since they are interpretable in various contexts and could therefore inform the design in differing situations. The conclusion explained that sublime architecture includes multiple ways of breaking of habits, which remains open to various design solutions and therefore does not limit the creative process. Furthermore, it expands the current perspective that architecture should offer comfort and protection from natural processes. Therefore, I consider this research to be a valuable contribution to the field of architecture.

During this graduation, I enjoyed researching this topic with the chosen methods and learned include complexity and unpredictability in my design. The process has taught me to design without architectural context, and in a vulnerable and dynamic environment. The fieldwork, literature and case studies have extended my knowledge of designing for all the senses and designing beyond comfort. Most of all, I learned how we can design architecture that enhances our experience of the sublime, which I believe to be particularly important, especially in the Netherlands and especially with the current shift in thinking relating to water. The immaterial values of architecture have always fascinated me and this research helped me to transform this vague and boundless subject into an informed design.

To summarize, I believe one should hold on to curiosity and sensitivity towards sensorial, spiritual, and disruptive architecture. However, it is important to maintain a clear scope within the widely interpretable concept of spirituality to prevent unwanted loss of time and overview of the initial research question.

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