Biesbosch bezinningslandschap

—

an enquiry into the characteristics
of a place for *bezinning* at the intersection of
architecture, landscape architecture and nature

Research report
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Fig. 1 – A misty morning on the Steurgat, one of the Biesbosch's main waterways.

PREFACE

‘*Vandaag ben ik voor het eerst naar de boerderij geweest. Het was mistig en nat. Het zicht vanuit de kleine kajuitramen reikte niet verder dan de wildbegroeide oevers. Na vijf minuten op het water in het ronkende bootje van Staatsbosbeheer was ik mijn oriëntatie volledig kwijt. Dit is de plek, zo voelde het.*’
– citaat uit eigen notities, 19 januari 2019

‘Today, I went to the farm for the first time. It was misty and wet outside. The view from the small cabin windows did not reach beyond the river banks. Just after five minutes on the water, in the soft thrum of the Staatsbosbeheer boat, I had completely lost my orientation. This is the place, I felt.’
– excerpt from my notes, 19 January 2019

Exploring topics and patterns that have interested me for a long time has proven to be an exciting and, in the end, clarifying process. When I embarked on this year of graduation, I was convinced that it would be easy to follow the straight-lined plan that I had set out for myself. But especially the first six months presented an opportunity to explore a wide range of fascinations that, to me, had held little connection to each other before: aesthetic philosophy, the meaning of nature, psychology in architecture... Somehow, they now fell into place, reinforced by the context of the Biesbosch. The report that lies before you is a track record of these nine months of exploration.

Next to a track record, this report functions as the theoretical framework and the toolbox for the design assignment. Even though this process is still underway, I have already noticed the challenges and rewards of implementing this new library of theories and tools, together with a deeper understanding of the design site. To friends, I have often compared it to building a highly complicated maze of guidelines and prerequisites for half a year, only realising what you have done when having to make your way through it as a designer. But suddenly you arrive at a point where it all makes sense and everything – designerly tools, (landscape) architectural vocabulary, program and design site – merges together and falls into place.

I hope you enjoy delving into this research and the Biesbosch landscape as much as I have.

SUMMARY

Looking around me, I see a growing need for moments of escape from society's general acceleration, our constant interconnectedness with each other and our disconnection with the natural world around us. This project is rooted in the belief that (landscape) architects can play a role in facilitating these moments, and that understanding the relation between environment, experience, behaviour and well-being will inspire us to design with people in mind. This report touches upon a range of topics relating to withdrawing to and contemplation in nature. It focusses on the symbiosis of environment, place and experience and the relation between the individual and the collective. The main question is: *What characterises a place for* bezinning *at the intersection of architecture, landscape and the natural setting? 'Bezinning',* in this context, encompasses an inclusive range of experiences and states, from relaxation, contemplation and restoration (healing) to deeper meditation, according to personal preference. 'Natural setting' refers to the place that we associate with 'going into nature'. In this context, the natural setting does not exclude culture and cultivation, but covers a wide variety of nature-culture landscapes.

This research has led to several conclusions that will be valuable input for the design assignment. Firstly, I have learned how landscapes for *bezinning* can be enriched by designing through two gradients: the intimacy gradient, ranging from privacy to collectivity, and the intensity gradient, ranging from the sublime to the beautiful – understood in this context as the charming and soothing vs. the intense and moving. The focus of the designer should not be on the bounds of these gradients (which would result in a dualistic and incomplete approach), but to the endless range of degrees that forms them.

An orchestrated embedding of the program and design in its context can reinforce and expand these gradients. Through the concept of contextuality – the careful symbiosis of landscape and architecture – one can create a more intense and encompassing experience.

In this report, the two gradients and the concept of contextuality are researched further through the analysis of various case studies, ranging from monasteries and guest houses, to gardens, ruins and landscape parks. These case studies support and augment the overall conclusions with designerly methods and tools. Together, they will inspire the design of a *bezinnings*-landscape: a complete landscape of interiors, exteriors and in-betweens that together form the setting for *bezinning.*

The challenge is to embed the essence and features of this setting for *bezinnings* in the existing landscape of the Biesbosch. Sandwiched between two urban conglomerations in the southwest of the Netherlands, this nature park is characterised by an other-worldly isolation – close, yet far-away from fast-paced modern life. A long route of phased deceleration brings the visitor to an archipelago of tamed wilderness and flooded polders. At its heart lies the Amaliahoeve. The owner, Staatsbosbeheer (the Dutch national organisation for the management of nature reserves and forestry), is looking to redevelop this uncharacteristically grand farm complex into a nature-focussed guest house. The surrounding landscape of the former polder ensemble Zuiderklip forms a sequence of the Biesbosch's historical layers, consisting of sand plateaus (*slikken* and *gorzen)*, former osier tree plantations and polders. Tidal rhythms of seasons, the water and seasonal visitors colour the landscape. Remnants of an agricultural upsurge stand as stilled landmarks along the route of a long dyke.

Together, the research's main conclusions, methods and tools and the site's core values and key features provide the point of departure for the design process. The goal is to embed the program of a *bezinnings*-landscape in the context of the Amaliahoeve, departing from and reinforcing the site's characteristics and creating an inclusive escapist nature retreat that answers to a wide range of preferences and motives.

CONTENT

Point of departure

Maandagochtend ging ik om 7 uur te voet naar Drimmelen, een fiets had ik nog niet. Op de rug had ik een reiszak gevuld met spek, boter, eieren en brood. Veerman Drik Diepstraten bracht ons dan naar de zuidkant van de Mokenpolder, waar hij ons vrijdags weer ophaalde. Het was zalig stil op de polders. Buiten de mensen met wie je werkte, zag je alleen de postbode(s) over de dijk gaan.
– herinneringen van boerenknecht Piet van Bragt

On Monday mornings, I left at 7 to walk to Drimmelen, I did not have a bike yet. On my back, I carried a knapsack filled with bacon, butter, eggs and bread. Ferryman Drik Diepstraten brought us to the south side of the Mokenpolder, where he would pick us up again on Friday. It was blissfully quiet on the polders. Apart from the people you worked with, you would only see the postman on the dike.
– memories of Piet van Bragt (Baart, 2010)

Fig. 2 – Café Diepstraten in Drimmelen, our point of departure. From here, we immerse ourselves in the Biesbosch

INTRODUCTION

My first visit to the Amaliahoeve marks my first ever visit to the Biesbosch. Within minutes after I have embarked the small boat that will take me to the farm, I am lost. The winding creeks, reed beds and misty sky make it impossible to orientate myself in this surprisingly vast delta landscape. Only when I see the orange tiled roof of our destination dooming up on the horizon, I have some idea of where we are. The barn of the Amaliahoeve stands among osier trees and the occasional electricity masts, settled on top of an agricultural dike. Without the context of roads, tractors, any signs of life, it is impossible to judge its size. Only when we have clambered up the dike and stand in front of the barn, I am confronted with its enormity. One of the large sliding doors is propped open and from behind it, we hear the roars of a chainsaw that replaces the thrum of the boat's motor. Only when it stops, I realise how silent it is here. The chainsaw is handled by Hennie, who is cutting wood for her fireplace. She introduces herself as the baroness of the Biesbosch. As a young woman, she regularly peddled her kayak around, until one day, she decided never to leave. She lives in the former worker's cottage next to the farm – alone, but with enough visitors. She eats what she can find and watches the deer and geese wake up in the misty fields behind her cottage every morning. Tourists come by regularly – it is publicly owned property. When they do, they admire her for her courage and say that they would like to make such a bold move themselves. But they never will, Hennie says. They couldn't.

Fascination

Starting this story with Hennie is inevitable. I think of here as the essence of Biesbosch life and she is to me a present-day Chris McCandless (whose flight into no-man's land is recorded by Jon Krakauer in the book *Into the Wild*) and Henry David Thoreau (*Walden*). I believe our interest and admiration for these characters is rooted in a (very old) desire to be in touch with nature – that is, to be near it, in it, moving through it and relating to it. It presents us with rootedness, with simplicity (or that is what we think), tranquillity, basic authenticity. It is a highly romanticised desire. Some would regard it as a trend, to which tourist agencies eagerly respond. But reading Thoreau and Edmund Burke (*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*), wandering the cloisters of medieval monasteries, studying paintings by artists such as Caspar David Friedrich and Jan van Goyen, I expect that this desire is rooted much deeper in our humanity. Where does this intricate relation with nature come from, and how has it changed over time?

My fascination with this longing for nature is not limited to its biology and history. I am specifically interested in the effects of our environment and environmental design on our physical and psychological states. Understanding the relation between environment, experience, behaviour and well-being will help us to design with people in mind, and to create an environment that is truly beneficial and inclusive.

Problem statement

We live in an ever-accelerating society. When I look around me, at friends, family, the news, I realise how difficult it is to step out of this rhythm. The key to modern life seems to be progress, moving forwards, improving. Both our calendars and our living environments are dense, hectic and all over the place. With this comes a movement that I think of as the return of romantic escapism – the urge for a physical or mental escape – although it is likely that this urge has always been here, that it is ingrained in who we are.

One of the places we look at for an intermission, for serenity and for deeper meaning, is nature. It has been proven in various studies that being in a natural setting, even just a small urban park, has a considerable effect on our physiological and psychological well-being (more on this in essay 1 and 2). Access to green spaces within these environments are growing, as is countryside tourism. I am interested in the role that architecture and landscape architecture can play in this (re)connection with nature. At the moment, there are various places that focus on relaxation and contemplation in relation to nature. Yoga retreats and wellness centres concentrate on the relation between physical and mental health, either through opulence or minimalism. Monasteries provide silence, rhythm and simplicity. Guest houses, country cottages and villas grant an escape, possibly a sense of conviviality, and collectivity (but are quite often in a higher price range

Fig. 3 – Meeting Hennie at the Amaliahoeve

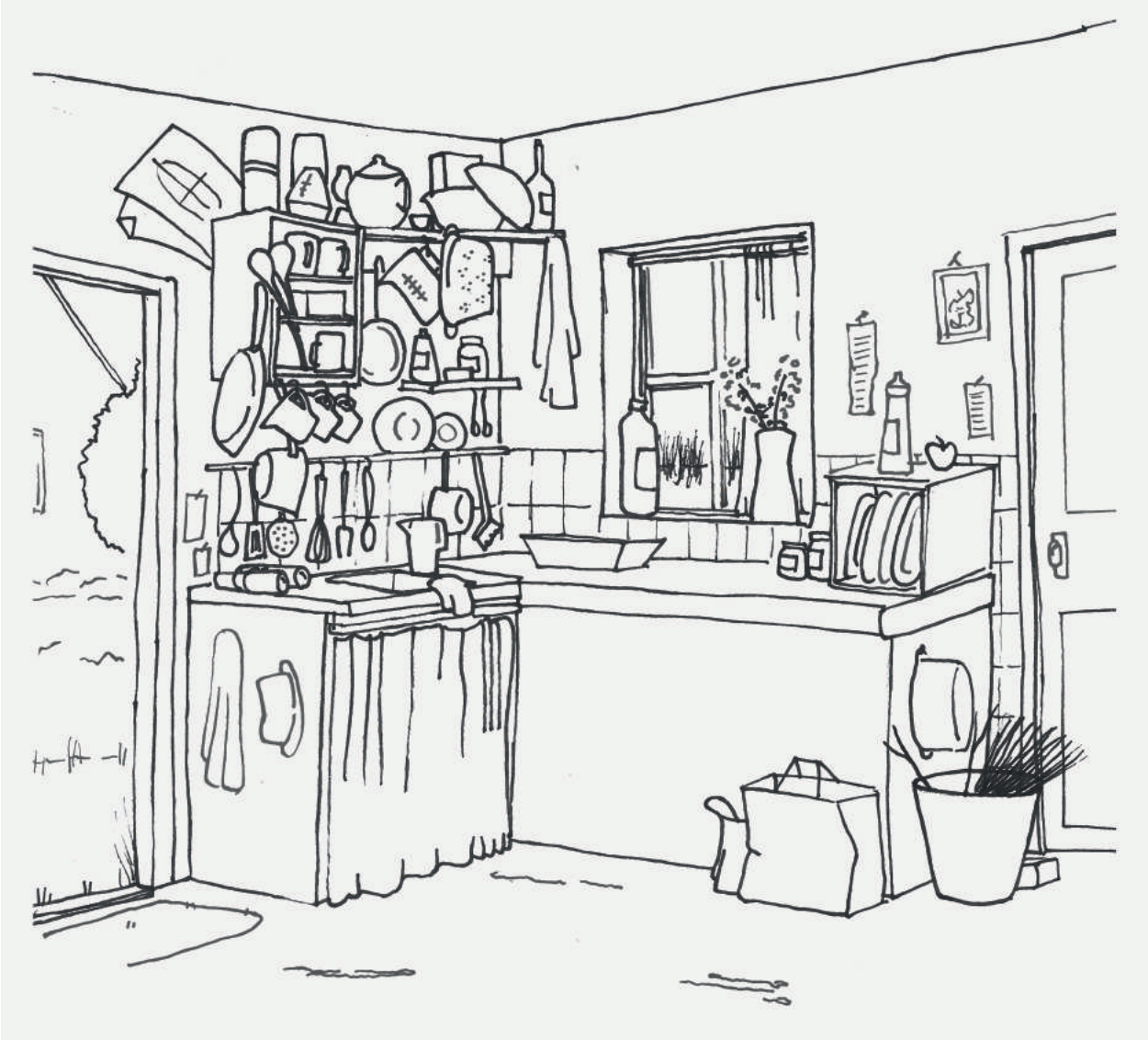
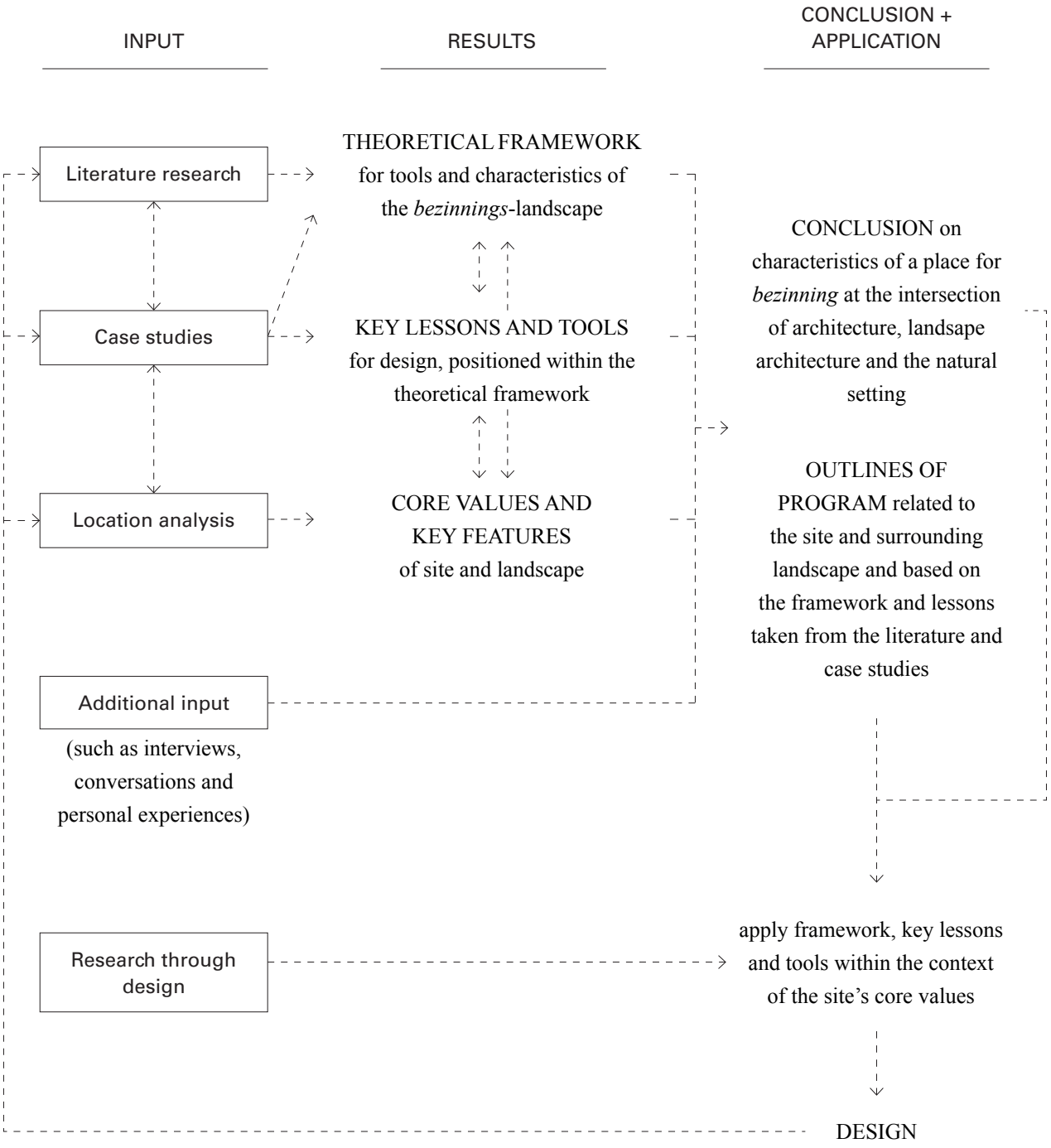


Fig. 4 – Hennie's fully equipped country kitchen


INPUT
RESULTS
CONCLUSION + APPLICATION
Literature research
Case studies
Location analysis
Additional input
(such as interviews, conversations and personal experiences)
Research through design
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK for tools and characteristics of the *bezinnings*-landscape
KEY LESSONS AND TOOLS for design, positioned within the theoretical framework
CORE VALUES AND KEY FEATURES of site and landscape
CONCLUSION on characteristics of a place for *bezinning* at the intersection of architecture, landsape architecture and the natural setting
OUTLINES OF PROGRAM related to the site and surrounding landscape and based on the framework and lessons taken from the literature and case studies
apply framework, key lessons and tools within the context of the site's core values
DESIGN

or require a party of more than one person). To all, the surrounding landscape and the natural setting provide a backdrop, a part of the decor. What happens if you take landscape and nature as the main focal point of the experience, if you consider architecture, landscape and nature as one powerful symbiosis?

Whenever I visit the Biesbosch, I find both joy and an instant sense of relaxation. I feel the outer world fading at the fringes and am overcome by an in-the-momentness that is new to me. I realise it will not be like this for everyone, and that the enquiry to come will therefore be rooted in a certain amount of subjectivity. But I do think, and again, research supports this, that quite a lot of people do. So: how do we cater to them, how can architecture and the experience of landscape facilitate relaxation and contemplation in nature? I believe that (landscape) architects can play an important role in decelerating modern life, not only by providing a break from it, but by marking the physical and mental space to reset the balance.

Research question

The main research question of this enquiry is:
What characterises a place for bezinning *at the intersection of architecture, landscape architecture and the natural setting?*
Several of these terms require further clarification. '*Bezinning*' – a Dutch term – in this case encompasses a range of experiences or states, ranging from relaxation, through a more engaged contemplation, to meditation or transcendence. The most important intention of using the term is that a *bezinnings*-setting should cater to different needs and preferences: where some people will look for relaxation, others should be able to find a deeper meaning. Essay 2 defines *bezinning* further.

The second term that requires explanation is 'natural setting', which is rather more complex. Entire books could be written about what the word 'nature' means to us. I make an attempt in essay 1, in which you will learn that I favour a broader definition. To me, natural settings do not exclude human interaction and intervention. Nature is not the opposite of culture, but can have many forms, ranging from gardens and cultural landscapes to wilderness.

In this enquiry, I focus on the more place-related 'natural setting', as opposed to the wider definition of 'nature'. Also, with 'natural setting', I mean the place or environment that we refer to when we say we are "going into nature". It is not necessarily wilderness in the strictest sense of the word, but – in this project – it is also not a city park or village green. This distinction is important, for I feel that designing a place for contemplation in a more urban context requires an altogether different research and design approach.

Lastly, the research question focusses on "the intersection of architecture, landscape architecture and the natural setting". As mentioned in the problem statement, this project aims to concentrate first and foremost on the experience of landscape and architecture as the vehicle for *bezinning* in nature. The intersection of architecture, landscape and the natural setting is the focal point of both this enquiry and the design project that will follow it. By researching the intersection of these fields and designing *through* them, I strive to invite a *Gesamterlebnis* that can be both powerful and soothing – an ambition that was consolidated by the three case studies that are part of this project.

Method

The input for this research is three-fold (see the scheme on the previous page).

1) LITERATURE RESEARCH, resulting in a FRAMEWORK of overall conclusions that are later expanded with tools and lessons taken from the case studies and a set of one-question interviews. Simultaneously, this literature research will provide me with theoretical background, definitions and inspiration for the project. The literature to be studied has a wide range:

- Psychological approach, such as *With People in Mind: Design and Management of Everyday Nature* (Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, 1998) and *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (Kellert & Wilson, 1995)
- Philosophical approach, such as *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (Burke, 1757) and *Natuur in mensenland. Essays over ons nieuwe cultuurlandschap* (Drenthen, 2018)
- Art and cultural history, such as *Eeuwige schoonheid* (Gombrich, 2001) and *Landscape and Memory* (Schama, 1995)
- Landscape architecture and history, such as *Contemporary Landscapes of Contemplation* (Krinke (ed.), 2005) and *Hidden Landscapes. The metropolitan garden and the genius loci* (De Wit, 2014)

This wide scope of theoretical input allows me to approach the assignment from different perspectives and to bring together different fields of study. It also illustrates the deep-rooted relation between man and nature, between landscape and architecture and between physiology and psychology. Studying these different sources from various fields will hopefully enable me to research and design at the intersection of people, architecture, landscape and nature.

2) CASE STUDIES. By studying meaningful examples, I extract KEY LESSONS AND TOOLS for the architectural and landscape-architectural design of a place for *bezinning*. Relating to the research question, these case studies will focus mostly on the interplay and synthesis of architecture, landscape and nature. The case studies are different types of sites and landscapes associated with relaxation and contemplation, namely a museum park (where the synthesis of art, landscape and architecture set the scene for a soothing and intense experience), a (former) abbey and a guest house located in a castle on a landscaped estate. The choice for these case studies will be discussed later in this introduction.

3) LOCATION ANALYSIS. By researching the history and characteristics of this landscape, I will provide a NARRATIVE SET OF CORE VALUES that will 1) enable me to embed the new program in its site and develop the sought-after synthesis of architecture, landscape and the natural setting and 2) provide me with points of departure for dealing with a heritage site.

Together with additional input of one-question interviews[1], smaller case studies and excursions, this input leads to the conclusion on the characteristics of a place for *bezinning* at the intersection of architecture, landscape architecture and the natural setting. Additionally, the literature and case studies will have inspired the outlines of a program brief for the design project, consisting of both tangible requirements and less tangible aspects such as transitions and atmospheres. The framework, key lessons and tools will be applied in the design process. While designing, I will likely be provided with new insights, further input and additional questions and I expect and hope that researching will continue throughout the process of designing.

Site

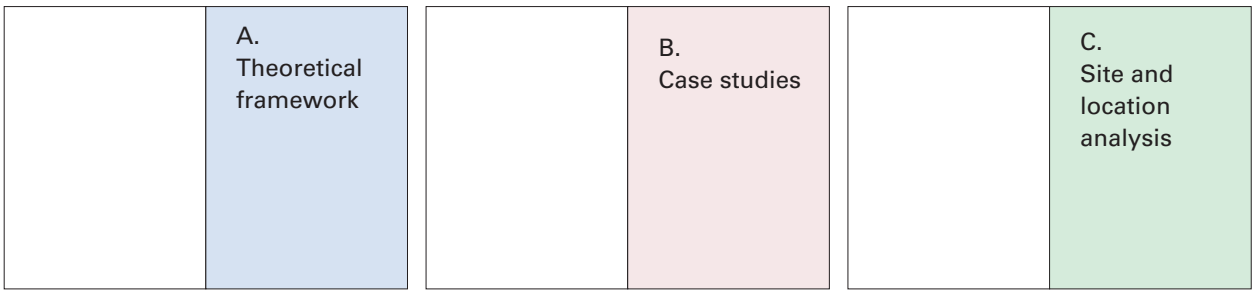
This project starts and ends in the Biesbosch. It began when I visited the Amaliahoeve, located on one of the last remaining polders of the Zuiderklip in the Brabant section of this nature park. The farm was built (mostly) in 1938-1939 and consists of a large barn, a farmer's villa and a small worker's cottage. The first two are heritage sites of national importance (*Rijksmonument*). The villa currently functions as a privately rented holiday house, the barn is mostly unused, apart from a few temporary activities such as military training sessions. The cottage is now Hennie's house. The farm is the legacy of a short-lived but ambitious agricultural campaign and narrowly escaped demolition when plans for a water reservoir (the last of four) did not go through. Staatsbosbeheer (the Dutch national organisation for the management of nature reserves and forestry and currently the owner of the ensemble) is looking to redevelop the barn into a function relating to nature retreats.

The Biesbosch is an interesting landscape, a perfect example of the intricacies of natural and cultural creation. For the last couple of years, its polders and creeks are being "given back to nature", as part of a re-naturalisation campaign. The Amaliapolder, part of an island, lies at its southern half's heart, among osier tree wilderness, reed beds, grassy dikes and Highlander cattle. Its location on an island in the middle of a nature reserve means that there is no running water, no electricity and no infrastructure. However, being an island, it also sets a promising scene for an escapist nature retreat: it is close, yet far away from everyday life. Even though the Biesbosch is located between the two urban belts of the Randstad and the Brabantse Stedenrug, reaching the farm requires a strong deceleration in the form of a slow boat ride of approximately 45 minutes over wide rivers and winding creeks, optionally followed by a one-hour hike over the interconnected dike bodies

Readers' guide

This research book is divided into three sections, interspersed by several intermezzos that discuss additional input.

1 Through a small amount of one-question interviews, I aimed to widen my scope and discuss what *bezinning* means to others and what settings, places and moments they associate with it. The interviewees came from my personal circle of friends and family as well as a selection of other guests that I met in Castle Slangenburg. Thus, they differed in age, gender, profession and social situation, which was reflected in their diverse answers.



Section A is about the theoretical framework. It consists of three essays. The first essay questions the predominant dualistic approach to culture and nature and looks to further define the concept 'nature'. It aims to answer the question: *What does nature mean to us and how do we position ourselves in relation to it?*

Essay 2 focusses on the meaning of '*bezinning*' and the *bezinnings*-landscape. Seeing that the term '*bezinnings*-landscape' will be used throughout this enquiry, I must emphasise here that with this term, I mean to indicate a complete landscape of interiors, exteriors and in-betweens that together form the setting for *bezinning*. Current research into the effects of natural environments is based in psychology and is often limited to restorative settings. For inspiration, we look into the sublime, a concept that (re-)entered aesthetic philosophy in the eighteenth century. The questions asked in this essay are: *What is the value of the sublime for the contemporary* bezinnings-*experience in a natural setting?* And *what characterises this* bezinnings-*experience?* In this essay, the definition of *bezinning* is further explored, and several relatively recent theories on the restorative and contemplative qualities of nature are compared to literature on the sublime.

The third essay zooms in on the user of the *bezinnings*-landscape. It researches the relation between the individual, others and environment and proposes a categorisation of these relations that ranges from inwards to outwards, and incorporates different modes of interaction.

Section B contains the three case studies: Hombroich Museum Insel in Neuss, Germany, Roosenberg Abbey in Waasmunster, Belgium and Castle (but now guest house) Slangenburg in Doetinchem, the Netherlands. Each contains many aspects related to *bezinning* in nature, but they were selected for different reasons. An important requirement was the fact that I had to be able to visit them myself. Since this project is about experiencing architecture, landscape and nature, it was important that I did so first hand. Secondly, I wanted to study a wide range of programs, to get an equally broad perspective on the possibilities of the *bezinning*s-landscape. Relating to the research question, it is important that the case studies are designed or positioned at the intersection of architecture, landscape and nature. The three case studies are of value for different reasons:

- Hombroich Museum Insel is designed as a synthesis of architecture, landscape and nature. The landscape forms the leading component and architectural landmarks are carefully embedded in this diverse setting, with a powerful result.
- Abbey Roosenberg is chosen because of the strong relation between program, function, architecture and landscape. It provides insight and inspiration concerning the characteristics of a place of serenity (atmosphere), simplicity (life), rhythm and devotion, with nature as a (stylised) backdrop.
- Castle Slangenburg functioned as a case study related to programme, preferences and behaviour of guests (including myself). It provides insight into the motives of interaction between people looking for *bezinning* in nature. This case study relates strongly to essay 3 and focusses on the human experience of landscape and architecture.

Section C consists of the site and landscape analysis. It starts with a cultural-historical research and continues on to the analysis of the site and the surrounding landscape. As said, the Amaliahoeve is a heritage site, which means that it is very important to depart from the existing situation and to respect, even celebrate, its many qualities. To provide the designer with the narrative, directives and perimeter of the intervention, the heritage site's cultural-historical, architectural and landscape-architectural qualities are summarised into core values.

SECTION A

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Fig. A1 – The three natures of wilderness (the mountains in the background), agrarian landscape (fiels in the middle) and garden (front). Fragment of painting 'Palace Gardens with Poor Lazarus in the foreground' by Hans Vredeman de Vries, ca. 1550-1606, oil on panel. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

ESSAY 1

Disinterested wilderness

On nature versus culture

'This is the river. Water, that strong white stuff, one of the four elemental mysteries, can here be seen at its origins. Like all profound mysteries, it is so simple that it frightens me. It wells from the rock, and flows away. For unnumbered years it has welled from the rock, and flowed away. It does nothing, absolutely nothing, but be itself.' (Shepherd, 2011, 23)

"Nature" is often considered to be one of, if not *the*, most complex words of the English language (Eagleton, 2000, 1). In western society, the term is predominantly defined as everything that has not been touched by man, and thus as the opposite of culture (Drenthen, 2018, 14). If this definition applies, we can conclude that there is no nature in the Netherlands, as every element of our landscape has been altered, removed and created by mankind (Voltaire famously noted that God created the world, but the Dutch created the Netherlands). We live in the epoch of the Anthropocene; the omnipresence of mankind has made us a geophysical power, equal to "regular" natural forces, such as weather and plate tectonics (Bernice Bovenkerk in interview with Brandpunt+, 2017). Once we accept this and manage to alter our view, we can work towards a more hybrid perspective, which is why some prefer to regard nature not as a factual entity, but as a concept – subjective and culturally determined – or as a gradient – some things are more "natural" than others (Matthijs Schouten and Bovenkerk in Brandpunt+, 2017).

Crucial to understand is that these notions – that is: defining culture as the opposite of nature, or defining some things as more natural than others – come forth from a deeply-ingrained dualistic and anthropocentric thinking that is fundamental to the western world view. As noted by Schouten, other societies and cultures, such as Aboriginals and Buddhists, see humankind as "just" another component of nature (Brandpunt+, 2017). It has been exactly this strict division between nature and culture that has lead to the problematic alienation of nature by mankind, sparking complicated discussions on wildlife management in the Oostvaardersplassen and the slight opening of the dam in the Haringvliet (Bos, 2008). Once we remove ourselves from this binary system of ordering the universe, we are enabled to re-evaluate and adjust our approaches to nature management, landscape design and environmental planning in general.

To relief ourselves of this ingrained dualism, we must first understand it, and where it came from. In the discussion that follows, it will become apparent that the history of the nature-culture partition has heavily influenced our postmodern world view of today: we have become aware that our ideas are fully dependent on the ones that have come before and that all these previous ideas hold some part of the truth. As a result, we are confronted with the relativity of the issue: there is an infinite amount of ways to explain nature, but none are fully suitable. Nature thus evolves into the amoral counterpart of culture, providing us with the perfect escape. To explore this notion further, this chapter travels through time and summarises the relationship between man ("culture") and wildness/naturalness ("nature") since prehistoric times, referring – in the light of this project at large – to the Biesbosch as an illustration of this development. It reflects on current views on the theme, in an attempt to answer the question: *What does nature mean to us and how do we position ourselves in relation to it?*

The perception of nature since prehistory

In pre-ancient times, the understanding of nature was based on myths and spiritual explanations, and therefore only accessible to priests and seers. Mankind was subjected to natural forces; nature was a powerful, unfathomable chaos to which they were forced to adjust (Drenthen, 2018, 21-22). In the Dutch landscape, including the Biesbosch and its surroundings, *terpen* (artificial mounds) illustrate this arrangement: settlers retreated to higher ground and (had to) let nature run its course.[1] Later, the ancient Greeks sought to explain and define this chaos philosophically. Nature, to them, held an absolute truth, as a meaningful, harmonious order, a κόσμος (kósmos), that functioned as a model for society. Mankind itself was part of this order, and could, through reason, understand and mirror the cosmic whole, and take its place in it (Drenthen, 2018, 22-24).

Some consider the introduction of Christianity as the starting point of the Western dualistic approach to nature and culture, but this is debatable, as it was Aristotle who introduced us to the thinking in pairs: act – potency, form – matter, nature – culture (Lent, 2017; Klundert, 2012, 46). To Christians, nature was understood as a divine creation, and it was up to mankind to fulfil God's work and use the divine order as its guide. Whereas wild nature had, in prehistoric times, been an inescapable given, it was now man's task to order it, to tame it. Nature was the infernal enemy that could and should be overpowered, with culture as the result of this conquest (Drenthen, 2018, 25). In the Biesbosch and its surroundings the growing power of Christian bishops indeed ran parallel with major *ontginningen* (cultivation) of the peat marshes, but in fact the Romans had come before them and treated the land similarly on a somewhat smaller scale (Timmerman, 2018, 27-31). In medieval times, wild nature aroused fear, but its softer side was recognised and utilised in enclosed gardens, where monks could take meditative and restorative walks in a monastery's cloisters and countesses may seek refuge or pleasure (Berg, Berg & Giesen, 2001, p. 9).

In sixteenth-century Italy, several humanists formulated the (non-dualistic) theory of three natures. Presumably departing from Cicero's conception of the cultural landscape – the landscape of sown corn, fertilised fields and dammed rivers created 'by means of our hands' – as second nature, Italian theorists like Jacopo Bonfadio conceived gardens as the *terza natura* ('third nature'): nature improved by art (Hunt, 2000, 33; De Jong, 1998). The first nature is, of course, wilderness, territory of the gods and remained, for now, a mystical, even dangerous place (Hunt, 2000, 51). This idea of three natures – wild, cultivated and created – prevailed in the following centuries, although our positioning in relation to them may have changed (De Jong, 1998). What is interesting here is that the theory does not exclude human activity or intervention from nature. It regards man as part of nature, and the definition of nature changes according to the human intervention applied.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, enlightened scientists sought to find and explain first nature's laws. Unlike the ancient Greeks, these laws had no moral value for mankind, they were simply scientific, impersonal facts and connections that could help in understanding, predicting and changing the course of nature (Drenthen, 2018, 26). Nature was essentially, for the first time, demystified and demoralised. It was regarded as passive, amoral matter that could be altered according to human needs. *Scientia potentia est*, knowledge is power.

In reaction to the demoralisation of nature, eighteenth-century romantic thinkers emphasised the importance of emotion over reason. In their eyes, nature provided a valuable

1 It is interesting and telling, that with the recent de-polderisation (ontpoldering) of the Biesbosch's Noordwaard, *terpen* returned to the new flood plain to protect the existing farms and houses, an example of an again-changing perception of nature.

experience that could reground man, an opportunity to reassess life and to regain the connection with one's inner self, one's surroundings and the universe as a whole (Drenthen, 2018, 30). Drenthen argues that we are still deeply romantic in our approach to nature (2018, 138). To many of us, pristine wilderness still represents the necessary medicinal counteract to excessive civilisation, secularisation, industrialisation and globalisation. Nature is our moral and elemental antidote to modernity. At the same time, this alienation of nature and this perceived remoteness between man and nature may keep us, especially in the altered landscape of the Netherlands, from a more worthwhile and effective approach to our surroundings. In this, the sixteenth-century three natures theory that encourages us to find nature not only in wilderness but also in our cultivated and urban landscapes and gardens might be more valuable.

Postmodern escapism

We have seen that, historically, the phenomenon of nature was successively mystified and scientifically dissected, its relation to mankind sought and diminished. The currently prevailing approach to nature is formed by secularism and postmodernism. Today, we tend to consider the existing order of things as the accidental product of evolution, a course that could have lead to an infinitive amount of other orders (Drenthen, 2018, p. 146). Additionally, we are familiar with the wide variety of other approaches to nature that history has brought forth. We are aware that these ideas were influenced by cultural and historical circumstances and are therefore subjective. We thus conclude that the concept of nature and its effects cannot be reduced to one definition.

In fact, it cannot be explained satisfactorily at all. Its coincidental quality and relativity surpass interpretation, and, according to Drenthen, it is exactly this amoral quality that makes natural settings the perfect escape from "culture". Nature, to us, does not present a new moral, it holds a complete lack of morality all together. In a natural setting, we can dwell in absolute relativity. Here, we are not judged, and we are not asked to judge (2018, 140-142).

The sentiment is captured beautifully in the story of adventurist Christopher McCandless, who, in 1992, retreated into the Alaskan woods, and eventually died there. In May 1992, he carved into a piece of plywood (signed with his alias Alexander Supertramp):

> 'Two years he walks the earth, no phone, no pool, no pets, no cigarettes. Ultimate freedom. An extremist. (...) And now after two rambling years comes the final and greatest adventure, the climactic battle to kill the false being within and victoriously conclude the spiritual revolution. (...) No longer to be poisoned by civilization he flees, and walks alone upon the land to become lost in the wild.' (Krakauer, 2018, p. 178)

Like all nature lovers, McCandless was, among others, inspired by Henry David Thoreau, perhaps the most famous transcendentalist, who also moved to the woods. His effort is not always appreciated, since he, during his two-year retreat, regularly visited his village, dined at his family's house only 15 minutes away from his cabin and brought lunch on his way back into the woods. Although his adventure is often deemed unsuccessful by those who would prefer a more absolute rejection of society, it shows that the effectiveness and logic of the experience may be within the reach of lesser 'extremists'.

Culture = nature = culture

The meaning and value of nature is today conceived as highly complex and unsolvable, and therefore comfortably simple. Some philosophers go even further than this analysis and find that the notion "nature" should be dropped entirely: "nature" does not exist, it is simply an infinite amount of (cultural) perceptions (Drenthen, 2018, 145). Like Simon Schama declares in the introduction of his treatise *Landscape & Memory*[2]: '(...) the healing wilderness [is] as much the product of culture's craving and culture's framing as any other imagined garden' (2004, 7). It is interesting that the ancient Greeks had already come up with this perspective. Heracleitos found that nature has the tendency to hide itself to us, that it is not possible for us to know it in its full truth, but only through interpretation and context (Klundert, 2012, 46). While in his view it was the ultimate task to bridge this gap and thus find Nature in its true Form, today's point of view aims for relativity, to accept that there is no clear division. Every view or definition of nature is culturally charged and therefore culture, 'so it is less a matter of deconstructing the opposition between culture and nature than of recognising that the term culture is already such a deconstruction' (Eagleton, 2000, 2). The nature-culture divide may be a gradient with no end points, no absolutes, but most importantly, it is pointless.

Conclusion

Whether, philosophically, we choose to define nature as the end point of a highly various gradient or as a non(or no longer)-existent concept altogether, we can conclude that 1) although the value and meaning of nature is highly subjective, 2) the immersion in a natural setting serves as an amoral escape from whatever society may entail, such as stress, expectations and an excess of complex input.

In the Anthropocene, nature *is* culture, but at the same time, it is more, because it was already here 'long before we were even dreamed. It watched us arrive' (Macfarlane, 2007, p. 59). Nature – of which we are now part – is so much older than mankind, and being confronted by this reminds us that our human order, an order that seems self-evident, is in fact formulated (Drenthen in interview with Kamp, 2018). It precedes and exceeds our interpretation. And this is what we eventually look for when we take a walk on the beach or book a retreat on a distant Biesbosch polder: to escape morale, to become part of something that does not allow to be appropriated physically, nor mentally.

Discussion

In this essay, an attempt has been made to regard nature as widely as possible. It has proven difficult to define "nature" *not* in relation to culture – also because most of the consulted sources depart from this dualistic approach. However, the three natures theory of, among others, Cicero and Bonfadio, has enabled us to regard nature not in contrast of but intrinsically linked to mankind. The next essay further explores the relation between the two.

2 Schama's book is celebrated as a, in the midst of other more pessimistic or analytical views, welcome positive approach to the problem posed. The book aims to introduce 'a way of looking; of discovering what we already have, but which somehow eludes our recognition and our appreciation. Instead of being yet another explanation of what we have lost, it is an exploration of what we may find.' (Schama, 2004, 14)

ESSAY 2

Breaking the habitual pattern

On the sublime, the beautiful and other theories

'Musicians speak of the 'reverberation time' of a note or chord: the time it takes that sound to diminish by a certain number of decibels. The reverberation time of that black and silver night on [Ben] Hope would be endless to me. Standing there, I knew that the memory of it might fade, but it would never entirely disappear.' (Macfarlane, 2007, 158)

The previous essay formulated the natural setting as an escape, as the counterweight of urban chaos, acceleration, vast progress and societal expectations, and as a comfortable disinterested and amoral domain. The exact definition of nature is complex. Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, in their research into nature's spatial characteristics that have a restorative effect on the visitor, define nature as 'a great variety of outdoor settings' that are predominantly vegetated or at least, not built upon (1998, 1). While this widens the (more traditional) definition of nature as remote wilderness and includes what Cicero and Bonfadio defined second and third nature, this definition does regards nature as a place, as a physical setting, disregarding its temporal and phenomenal aspects, e.g. natural disasters, change of seasons and insects. In their poetic descriptions of sublime landscapes, the romanticists did not only refer to infinite, empty mountainscapes, but mentioned icy winters, violent storms and mysterious sounds. While both the essay that follows and the research project at large attempt to regard nature in this wider context, it must be said that – due to the limitations of the consulted literature and the design project's aim – the general focus is on spatial aspects. For the sake of clarity, the distinction is signified by the difference between "nature" and "the natural environment". Both incorporate the scope of the three natures, i.e. wilderness, cultivated landscape and gardens.

Visiting the Biesbosch and various other case studies, I have come to the realisation that, more than getting *away* from certain societal aspects, an important part of the escape is where to go *to*. The contemplative and restorative landscape is not necessarily constituted of a lack of noise, crowds and expectations, but has its own story, its own social life, its own spatial qualities, and its own rhythm. What is it that we search for in this landscape, and what do we find? In order to further formulate the vocabulary of *bezinning* in a natural setting, this essay looks into the definition of *bezinning* and its philosophical and psychological foundations. It is, once again, inevitable to travel back in time, to the moment when nature was first regarded as a desired, exclusively moral and emotional circumstance. In 1757, Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* presented an influential step in the introduction of subjective and visceral aesthetic experience, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, there appear to be several similarities between Burke's argument and that of more recent psychological conclusions on the restorative qualities of nature.

This essay aims to answer two questions:
What is the value of the sublime for the contemporary bezinnings-*experience in a natural setting? What characterises a* bezinnings-*experience in a natural setting?*
First, we explore the definition of *bezinning*, and several relatively recent theories on the restorative and contemplative qualities of nature. We then take a side step into art history and philosophy to understand the arrival of the concept of the sublime. It will become apparent that,

over the last two centuries, the harsh concept of the sublime has somewhat abated, allowing us to study its core principles, with the help of the recent doctoral research of dr. Paul Roncken on the contemporary value of the sublime in landscape architecture (2018). This essay ends with a short exploration of the similarities between the natural sublime and the *bezinnings*-landscape, and a conclusion on the characteristics of the *bezinnings*-experience.

Definition of *bezinning*

While concepts such as 'restorative' gardens and 'landscapes for contemplation' are often used in studies into the effect of nature and landscape on psychological and physiological well-being and health, they are, in the light of this project, not suitably inclusive (Stigsdotter and Grahn, 2002; Krinke, 2005). To some, "restorative" may suggest repair, or healing. "Contemplative" suggests primarily a cognitive activity, that takes place first in the mind and may consequently influence body and soul. Admittedly, "restorative" and "contemplative" are defined in many ways and may also be understood respectively as "therapeutic" or "rebalancing" and "meditative" or even "dreamy", but to prevent exclusion and personal interpretation, I have opted, in this project, to select a different term and set its definition as broad as possible. The Dutch and German languages provide the more inclusive concept of *bezinning*, which, firstly, surpasses the place of activity (it takes place in mind, body and soul) and, secondly, can range from rest and relaxation, through reflection and contemplation, on to meditation and even transcendence. Most importantly, the *bezinnings*-landscape is inclusive – it disregards religion, mental and bodily state and motivation as decisive factors – and provides all those in search of it with a contemplative, restorative, slowing-down or simply relaxing experience, according to their need.

Recent theories on restorative landscapes

Over the past decades, various studies and hypotheses have been developed on the restorative and soothing effects of nature. Often quoted is the psychological research and landscape-architectural pattern language by Kaplan and Kaplan and their Information Processing Theory (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002, 62). Their theory is based on the human need for information and overview – people's ingrained desire to make sense of the world (Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, 1998, 7). There are two ways of processing information: directed attention and soft fascination (spontaneous attention). The first is applied in daily work, such as doing paperwork and driving in unknown environments, and requires a lot of energy, leading to 'mental fatigue' (Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, 1998, 17). The second, applied when, for example, observing small natural phenomena during a walk in a park, requires much less effort and is executed far less consciously. The capacity of this kind of attention is practically unlimited, because 'impressions in nature are contained in a larger whole and therefore not in need of being sorted out and sifted out by the directed attention of higher consciousness' (Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, 1998, 18).

According to the Kaplans' theory, a successful natural environment contains the right balance between understanding, based on the coherence and legibility of the landscape, and exploration, based on complexity and mystery (Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, 1998, 13). A landscape that is coherent and legible is organised orderly and distinctively and enhances the ability to orientate oneself. Complexity and mystery in a landscape constitutes an experience that is diverse, continuously interesting and holds the 'promise that one can find out more as one keeps going' (Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, 1998, 14-16). Based on this theory is a language of over 40 patterns that can help in the creation of a restorative natural setting. Most of these themes centre on a feeling of safety, security, orientation and pleasant exploration, such as

‘enhancing familiarity’, the presence of ‘human signs’, ‘landmarks’, ‘a sense of enclosure’, ‘a sense of depth’, gateways, the qualities of attractive trails (narrow and curving), and of views that ‘guide the eye’ (Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, 1998). Additionally, it is important to create a physical and mental distance from the place that is the source of fatigue – a ‘separation from distraction’ – and the concept of extent – the availability of a space that is large enough or organised in such a way that the boundaries are not evident.

Other theories on the restorative qualities of nature look into the issue from a biological evolutionary perspective, regarding man as a biological individual that is suited most for a life close to nature, where he is able to react according to his unconscious reflexes (as opposed to the city, where he needs to apply logic) (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002, 62). A similar theory is developed by Jay Appleton. According to his Prospect-Refuge Theory, humans are driven by survival, and thus require prospects to gain overview and gauge possible ‘hazards’, and refuges to hide from them (Appleton, 1975, 73, 96). An ideal landscape should therefore provide enough (promises of) panoramas, vistas, enclosures and shelters for it to be considered agreeable and beautiful. The biophilia concept coined by biologist Edward O. Wilson is based on the hypothesis that humans have an innate ‘urge to affiliate with other forms of life’ (Kellert & Wilson, 1995, 416). Additionally, theories have been developed that look for a more active form of restorative participation, described by Stigsdotter and Grahn as Horticultural Therapy. This theory states that man is ‘at heart an active creature’ and that using his mind in pursuit of meaningful occupations (such as gardening), ‘give a feeling of well-being, total commitment, and forgetfulness of time and self’ (2002, 63).

While the contemporary theories discussed above are highly informative and important for the understanding of the restorative qualities of the experience of nature, they seem to prescribe a highly choreographed and easily accessible experience. These evolution-based theories focus on safety and security, ensuring an emotionally pleasant and undemanding experience. The Kaplans look explicitly into natural settings ‘that is, or ideally would be, nearby’. Apart from the fact that this focus on evolution and primitive preference is sometimes criticised on scholarly grounds (Roncken, 2018, 44), the experience it aims to construct seems to be deeply founded in today’s societal tendency for over-control. They focus principally on preference, and do not consider moral meaning or significance on a deeper lever (Roncken, 2018, 42). Interestingly, the theories explored above show similarities with the aesthetic definitions that the philosopher and politician Edmund Burke (1723-1792) developed over two centuries before them. Both are founded on self-preservation. But whereas the Kaplans and other psychologists look for safety and security, Burke finds meaning and impact in terror and delight.

On the sublime

Until the first half of the eighteenth century, the Platonist conception of aesthetics dominated every perspective on nature, landscape and architecture, emphasising order, symmetry, regularity, simplicity and proportion as the factors of Beauty (note here the interesting similarities to the Kaplans’ focus on legibility, clarity and coherence). This theory was copied and further extended by renaissance humanists, most importantly the architect-philosopher Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), neo-Platonist Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1588). In the eighteenth century, influenced partly by enlightened empiricism, a shift occurred. In 1753, the painter William Hogarth (1697 – 1764) printed his book *Analysis of Beauty*, in which he set out his theory on the beauty of a line and its six characteristics: fitness, variety, uniformity, simplicity, intricacy and quantity. The optimisation

of all these characteristics, the Line of Beauty, proposed a 'happy mean' between the twisted and clumsy, and the straight and monotonous (Thompson, 2000, 20). Four years later, Burke published his enquiry and in the same era, Lancelot "Capability" Brown (1716-1783) was producing gardens that would later be considered the epitome of the English landscape style. The Zeitgeist was changing and this was perhaps most apparent in art. Already in the seventeenth century, French painter Claude Lorrain (1600-1682) had 'opened our eyes to the divine beauty of nature', and the Dutch painters Jan van Goyen (1596-1656) and Jacob van Ruisdael (1629-1682) managed to echo feelings and moods in their more realistic depictions of the unpretentious natural beauty of the Dutch landscapes (Gombrich, 2001, 397, 419-429). In the century that followed, the discussion on aesthetics was more or less reorganised in three categories: the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque. Burke had an important role in defining the first two. He refuted the then predominant conception of beauty as harmonious, well balanced and orderly and redefined aesthetics as a subjective experience, grounded in our own physiology (the mechanisms of the body) as opposed to reason and absolute truth (Hipple, 1957, 84). He thus moved the foundations of natural beauty from mathematics and objectivity to biology and subjectivity.[1]

According to Burke, beauty induces positive pleasure and derives from aspects such as smallness, smoothness, gradual variation, delicacy and fragility. The sublime 'turns on pain and danger', causes delight and is based in self-preservation (Burke, 1757, 33-44). This delight depends on spatial qualities such as darkness, power, privation, vastness, infinity, magnificence, loudness and suddenness. While the experience of positive pleasure 'quickly satisfies' and, once over, leaves us in 'a state of indifference', delight caused by pain or terror leaves us 'in a state of sobriety, impressed with a sense of awe' (Burke, 1757, 34-35).

The picturesque, lastly, was introduced by William Gilpin in 1782 as a third aesthetic ideal, and define, based on Dutch landscapes by painters such as Van Ruysdael and Van Goyen, as 'that kind of beauty which is agreeable in pictures'. Picturesque landscape paintings contained intricacy and variety, irregularity and imperfections (De Wit, 2014, 16). The position of the painter was carefully chosen, but still resulted in a sort of accidentalness, presenting a natural setting as it is. It provided a more accessible and feasible vehicle in the everyday experience of nature. Gadgets such as the Claude glass and Gilpin's guidebooks allowed tourists to perceive natural landscapes as art, in other words: to find art in everyday nature (Roncken, 2018, 37).

While it took philosophers almost a century to catch up with art in the development of their theories on beauty (inspired partly by Claude Lorrain's paintings) and the picturesque (inspired by the Dutch landscape), it took painters many years to capture the sublime. Francisco Goya (1746-1828), William Blake[2] (1757-1827), Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) and Joseph Mallard William Turner (1775-1851) strove to express the nightmares, horror, 'dazzling splendour' and vastness of nature and romantic moods of the rapidly industrialising landscape (Gombrich, 2001, 492-496). By the time Turner painted 'Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth' (1842) and Friedrich finished 'Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer' (1817), theories on the sublime had already started to shed their harshness and absoluteness and the

1 Burke himself was actually opposed to the idea of Taste, that is: to the possibility of subjective preference in beauty. According to him, differences in taste were merely the product of a fault in judgement. Beauty and sublimity could still be *defined* objectively (as in: elements had certain characteristics that defined their beauty or sublimity), but they were *experienced* in the body and thus subjectively.

2 Actually, Blake strongly disagreed with the theories of Burke as he considered them still a product of the Enlightenment, whose attempt to label and categorise aesthetic experience was far too mechanic and insensitive (Hartmans, 2005)

Fig. A2 – Hawkstone Park, inspired by Claude Lorrain's paintings (hawkstoneparkfollies.co.uk)

Fig. A3 – Jacob Isaacksz. van Ruisdael, 'Landschap met waterval', ca. 1668, oil paint on canvas. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

Fig. A4 – Joseph Mallord William Turner, 'Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth', oil paint on canvas, exhibited 1842. Tate Museum, London, UK.

Fig. A5 – Caspar David Friedrich, 'Monk by the Sea', c. 1809, oil on canvas. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany.

natural sublime became more moderate (Streng, 1997, 276). With the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a less extreme and more generally applicable approach towards the sublime was introduced, and towards the end of the nineteenth century, gloom and melancholy were accepted only if balanced by small glimmers of hope on the horizon, as illustrated by, for example, the work of French painter Théodore Gudin (1802-1880) and Wijnand Nuijen (1813-1839) (Streng, 1997, 276-279).

Streng also emphasises that the need for sublimity and terror (which rooted most strongly in British art and German romanticism and mysticism) never gained much interest in the Netherlands. It was considered as too threating, too mystical, too symbolic, and, most importantly, far too catholic. The Dutch spirit, art and politics were eminently characterised by *deugdelijkheid* (virtue), realism and clarity (Streng, 1997, 298). Accordingly, Dutch paintings are generally considered as the main inspiration for picturesque landscape painting and ablest in capturing a detailed reproduction of the visible world (Streng, 1997, 283).

This notion brings us back to the location of this project: the quintessentially picturesque landscape of the Biesbosch. It is unlikely that the introduction of a terrifying height or infinite emptiness here, as prescribed by Burke, has the sought-after effect in the creation of a *bezinnings*-landscape. It is not my intention to project Burke's flamboyant spatial language of the sublime on this relatively delicate and intricate landscape (although the area has, in its history, suffered some very sublime hazards). I am convinced that his theory holds a more sensitive essence that supports our search for the *bezinnings*-landscape. To research this more contemporary, applicable value, we shall move on to more recent studies on the meaning of the burkean sublime.

Contemporary value of the sublime

Today, Burke's 'romantic' ideas inspire some (landscape) architects to focus on 'the emotive power of landscape', and to create 'an intense physical or emotional experience' that reconnects man and nature, emphasising the 'overwhelming' quality of the sublime (Lee and Velde, 2012, 11-12). Thompson, too, describes the sublime strategy as an approach that emphasises the 'overwhelming power or vastness of nature' to which people can respond 'with awe and wonder' (2000, 34). The most insightful research into contemporary applications of the sublime is provided by Paul Roncken, in his doctoral dissertation on the sublime 'as an instrument in the making of meaning' (2018).

Roncken notices a newly sparked interest in the sublime that responds to the increasing neglect of the participating influences of audiences in the creation of landscape and architecture. 'Wrong, degraded environments and fearful social phenomena' such as the impersonal qualities of the internet, consumer society and the rapid succession of images we are served through new media initiated a growing interest in what he calls "negative" aesthetics; the non-beautified, *real* elements of nature (Roncken, 2018, 18). The sublime approach invites a more powerfully visceral and active experience, as opposed to the voyeuristic 'tourist gaze' sparked by globalism, easy travel and the internet (Roncken, 2018, 34). In both the contemporary and the historical theories on the sublime, Roncken ascertains a mediation of its harsh fundamentals, and a unanimous agreement on 'a sense of awe' as the sublime's main effect and purpose (Roncken, 2018, 32). Burke himself had already moderated the notions of pain and terror in the sublime: 'when danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful' (Burke, Part I, section VII). Later, Kant focused on the sense of awe and

respect that often immediately followed the fear induced by the vastness of nature (Roncken, 2018, 9). Thus, the sublime is not necessarily about the threat of the experience itself, but about its liberating effect on the beholder. To both Burke and Kant, the sublime:

> 'entailed a desire to change oneself drastically by self-motivation […]. The idea behind the sublime was to reinstall an imperative to think and sense for oneself through the liberating act of experience.' (Roncken, 2018, 122)

Perhaps the most important interpretation of the sublime is provided by Thomas Weiskel in his treatise *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976). Weiskel proposes a three-phased model for the sublime experience. First, the mind is in its everyday state, more or less unconsciously. This habitual constant is suddenly broken down, after which, finally, the mind recovers and a new relationship between one's self and one's surroundings is constructed (Roncken, 2018, 118). Weiskel suggests that the sublime 'may be present whenever aesthetic engagement breaks a habitual pattern' (Roncken, 2018, 139).

Conclusion

In this essay, we have discussed two fields of study into the effects of the experience of natural landscapes. Firstly, it interesting to note an occurring similarity. At the beginning of this essay, I introduced the concept of *bezinnings*-landscape as an inclusive setting that allows for both restoration (healing) and contemplation, for relaxation, re-balancing and deeper meditation. Similarly, Burke deduced the aesthetic experience to appealing and soothing (through beauty) and unsettling and awe-inspiring (through sublimity). I agree with him that in life – and in the *bezinnings*-landscape – we need both.

The restorative landscape as described by psychologists such as the Kaplans and the definition of beauty by Burke are based on spatial serenity, clarity, softness, legibility. But, according to Roncken, the bezinnings-landscape could have a more significant effect, namely a more general 'making of meaning'. This may present a contrast with the ideas of Martin Drenthen, explored in the previous essay, who stated that the most important quality of nature is the fact that it is amoral, that is surpasses morality and is therefore disinterested and non-judgemental. The 'making of meaning' that Roncken refers to, however, does not take place in the surroundings but deep inside one's self. Exactly because nature does not require logic, or attention, or moralisation, there is space within to explore one's self. The sublime presents a sudden break with the habitual pattern that invites internal exploration and reconstruction. Another vital element of the bezinnings-landscape, we can thus conclude, is the lasting effect that comes with this reformulation.

Conclusions on the Biesbosch

In this essay, we have looked into some interesting contemporary and historical ideas on the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque. We have learned that the Dutch landscape is the main inspiration for and expression of the latter and that, to the down-to-earth, protestant Dutch, the sublime experience presented a step to far. We have also come to the conclusion that, in its essence, the sublime presents a break with the habitual.

The architect Mirko Zardini regards the picturesque as a new way of reading the contemporary urban landscape (2001). According to him, in today's cities, the rule of harmony and order that once structured their outlines – in contrast with wilderness – no longer holds. In this new world of contrasts and hybridisation, the picturesque has established itself as a means

to understand differences and individualism, blurring the distinction between the natural and the artificial. Both in the natural and urban landscape of today, the picturesque is the everyday blend of two extremes, a landscape of diluted emotions that reaches from city to countryside. The sublime – and its definition as an awe-inspiring, pattern-breaking moment in time and space – may provide us with the necessary interruption of this everyday picturesque.

ADDENDUM TO ESSAY 2

The beautiful charms, the sublime moves

Later reflections on the beautiful and the sublime

After writing the second essay of this thesis, and starting to take steps towards designing, I struggled with the theoretical and philosophical approach of my enquiry into the soothing (beautiful) and intense (sublime) qualities of the *bezinnings*-experience. How to architecturally shape 'an aesthetic engagement that breaks a habitual pattern', how to intervene in a natural setting in a way that invites not only admiration and comfort, but also internal exploration and reconstruction?

Burke gives some physical aspects for the sublime – e.g. vastness, succession, magnitude, uniformity, infinity – and the beautiful – e.g. smallness, fragility, gradual variation. So do the Kaplans for the restorative landscape. However, (landscape) architectural examples are scarce in both enquiries. Concerning the sublime, Étienne-Louis Boullée's drawings are sometimes considered as one of the first applications of Burke's theory, but – not without reason – they have never been realised (Rosenblum, 1969, 149). Concerning the soothing (which shows many similarities with the effects of the beautiful as described by Burke), the Kaplan's provide many informative drawings and pictures, but most of them apply to settings close to or in the city, e.g. the spatial organisation of a view from a window, or of trees in a park. Choreographing a "new" landscape is not what this design project is about.

And so started a small yet worthwhile quest into representations of the beautiful (soothing, comfortable) and sublime (intense, awe-inspiring) in more recent (landscape) architectural projects. Analysing and visiting these projects, and then reading about the experiences of others in them, it struck me how subjective the experience of a place is. For example, while I found sublimity in the seeming infinity and versatility of Brandt's garden rooms in Ordrup, Copenhagen, a colleague with whom I visited found its simplicity soothing and relaxing. Burke related darkness to confusion, terror and uncertainty, while contemporary artist James Turrel sees it as 'soft and enveloping, almost like a material' (in the documentary *Architecture of Infinity* (2018), directed by Christoph Schaub).

Eighteenth-century Burke did not belief in Taste (see footnote 1 of essay 2), but today, we realise more and more how much relies on subjective experience. Realising this subjectivity, studying the experiences and feelings that certain places and structures can invoke becomes difficult. Here, Immanuel Kant's focus on the experience of beauty and sublimity – in contrast to Burke's focus on the objective aspects of what causes beauty and sublimity – can be helpful:

> 'Finer feeling (...) is (...) of two kinds: the feeling of the sublime and the beautiful. The stirring of each is pleasant, but in different ways (...). The sublime *moves*, the beautiful *charms*.' (Kant, 1764, p. 47)

In the discussion of projects that follow, the case studies are not labelled as either sublime or beautiful. What is far more interesting, in my opinion, is to study the qualities of these projects and the experience and emotion that they arouse in their visitors.

One final thing occurred to me in searching for and studying the examples of sublime and beautiful places and projects. While the definition of beauty has changed through time and is now – having survived post-modernism – considered to be too complicated and subjective to be defined (or even mentioned), the definition of sublime has remained very close to that of Burke and Kant (Nesbitt, 1995). Using these concepts as a point of departure may cause confusion or even disagreement. Again, I must emphasise that I have realised through this research how personal and subjective the experience of space, place and structure can be. The small case studies that follow are therefore based mostly on my own experience. I do not intend to bestow my experience on others, but to 1) research and display how places and buildings can invoke beauty and/or sublimity in someone and 2) to take from these case studies some (landscape) architectural lessons for my own design project.

INTERMEZZO

Case studies of the sublime and the beautiful

Garden of Exile

Location	Berlin, Germany
Construction	1992-2001
Architect	Daniel Libeskind

Fig. A6 – Looking up from between the blocks of the Garden of Exile (Bryan Nance, 2006)

The Garden of Exile, which is located outside of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, consists of forty-nine concrete blocks laid out in a 7 by 7 square. The garden is surrounded by an impassable concrete wall that blocks views to the surroundings. The floor slants with a 12° gradient. On top of the concrete columns Russian olive trees are planted, symbolising, according to the museum's website, hope. The Garden of Exile recalls 'the lack of orientation and instability felt by Jewish émigrés in World War II' ('The Libeskind Building', n.d.).

When searching my memory for a sublime experience, my visit to the Garden of Exile is the first one that comes to mind. I remember feeling so relieved – elated even – when finally escaping the highly intense interior of Libeskind's intense voids, stumbling into the garden, breathing in fresh air, and feeling relief while moving freely through the slanted garden. Soon, however, the limitations of the small garden become apparent, the relief of being outside is replaced by the realisation that one is again captured. In summer, the greenery on top of the columns may provide some sense of positivity, but in winter, their crookedness forms a daunting crown on top of the bleakness of the concrete. From an almost fun play on perspective, the blocks tower above the visitor, and it is impossible to temporarily step off the slanted floor. The atmosphere of the garden is uneasy, daunting, prison-like. Infinity contrasts with the finiteness of the garden, the lack of life is depressing. It is disorientating, uncomfortable, loaded with symbolism. That initial elation, followed by the more slowly dawning but equally oppressive disorientation presents a sublime experience according to Burke's, Kant's and Roncken's books.

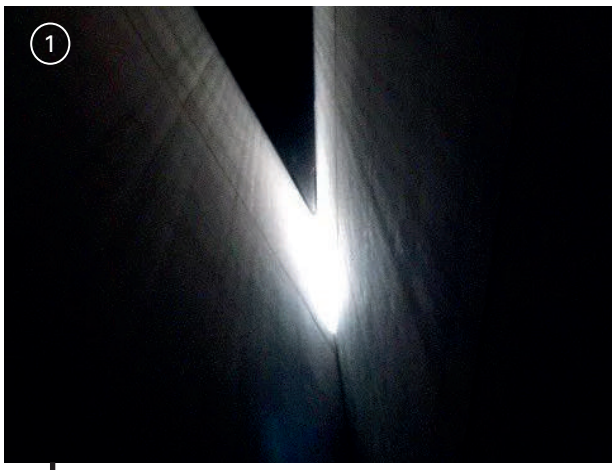


Fig. A7 – One arrives at the garden after the intense experience of the voids in and content of the museum.

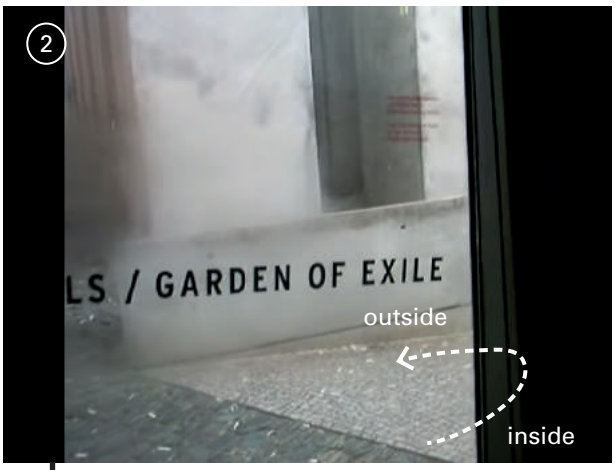


Fig. A8 – One escapes the heavy interior and step outside. The fresh air provides relief, one might feel elated, even playful.[1]

Fig. A9 – The elation is soon replaced by the discomfort from the slanted floor and the realisation that one is again confined.

Fig. A10 – The blocks rise overhead, the sky is blocked from view by the branches of the olive trees, forming – again – a roof over one's head.

Fig. A11 – The slanted floor becomes tiring. The seeming infinity of the 49 blocks becomes pressing.

1 The feeling of relief and elation felt out of touch in the heavy interior of the garden, but the playful feeling may not be so strange. Danish landscape architect C.Th. Sørensen regarded the sublime and childish as very closely related. In his book *39 garden plans. Typical gardens for tract houses* he writes about a plan with a spiral shaped hedge and asks himself if it childish to propose something like this (Andersson & Høyer, 2001, 148). De Wit also finds a playful sublimity in the Wasserkrater Garden (2014, 309). The honest, unfiltered and emotion-based way in which children experience the built environment may be similar to the passionate, bodily experience of the sublime.

Cahergall Fort

Location	County Kerry, Ireland
Construction	7th century AD

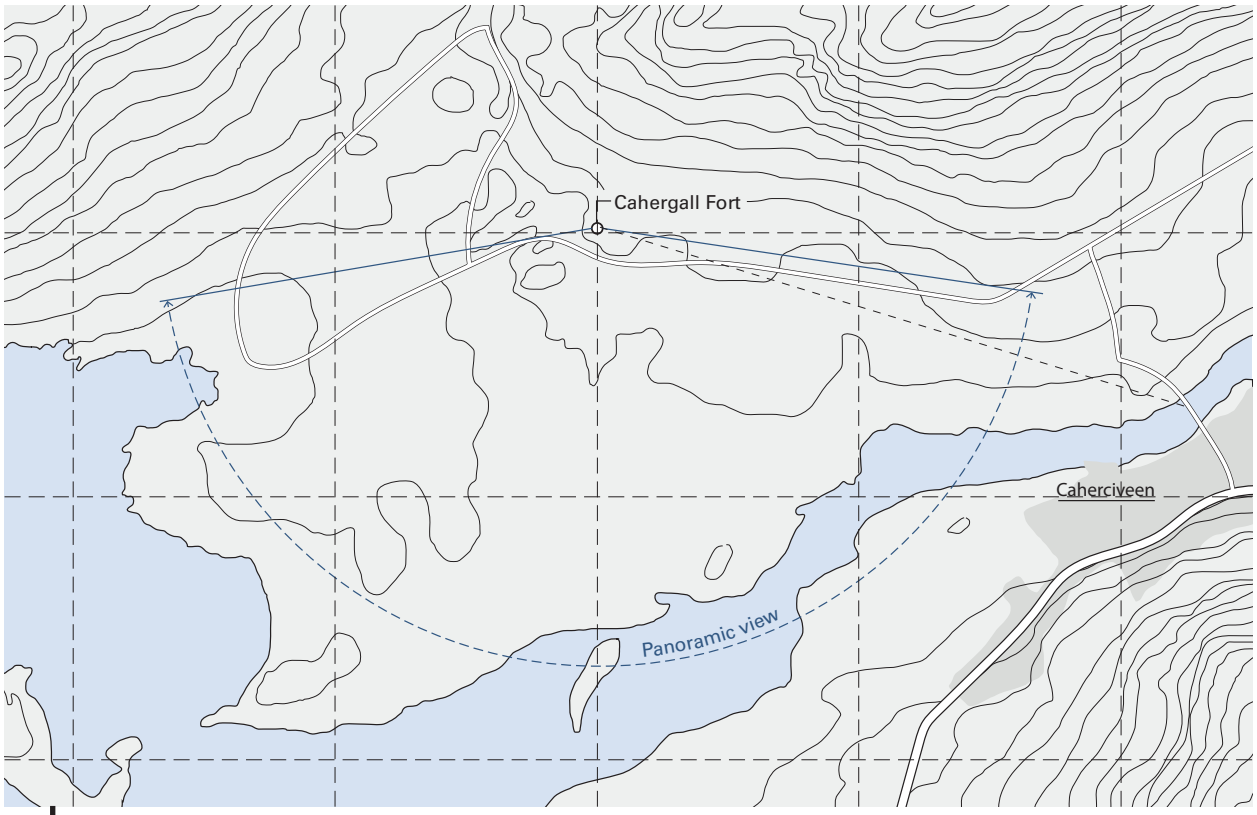


Fig. A12 – Cahergall Fort, with panoramic view to south side and sheltered by the hills on the north side

The ruin appears in many romanticist paintings and were purposely recreated in the English landscape gardens. Its decay represent the effects of ravaging time, capturing emptiness, power and privation. I found an interesting combination of sublimity and beauty in and around the circular fort of Cahergall in County Kerry, Ireland, which I visited in the Summer of 2016.

The fort was built in the 7th century AD. As one enters the fort through the only passage, one ‘feels’ the passing of these centuries in the five meter thick walls. The simpleness of the circular shape has a sort of perfection about it. Once inside, the view is limited to grass, stone and sky. The similarities with James Turrell’s Celestial Vault inevitably come to mind. A way out is provided by the steps that are integrated in the walls. Trying not to lose my footing on the small steps, the visitor tends to look down as he climbs his way up, until suddenly he is able to look over the edge and the valley spreads out on the other side of the wall. Behind him, seclusion and safety, before him, infinite land and sea.

Even though ruins are associated often with defeat, with impermanence, with sorrow, they can also have a very soothing effect. Ruins put things in perspective, they do not only symbolise transience, but also resistance.

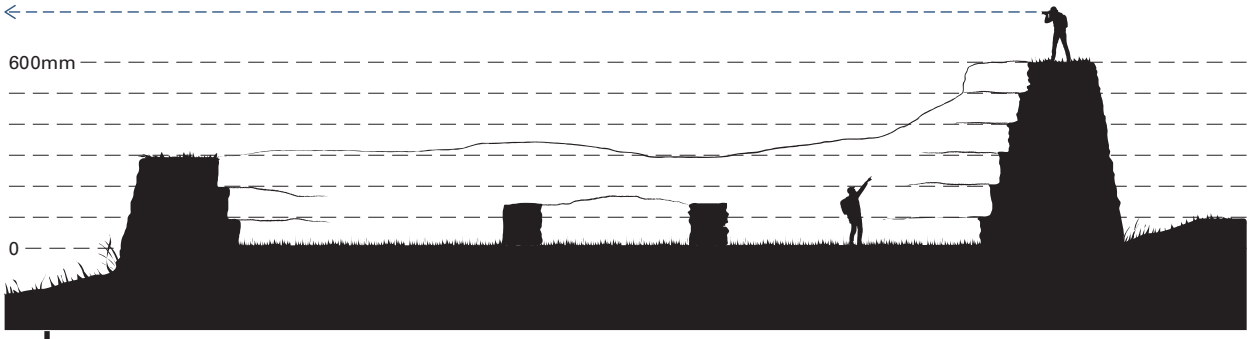


Fig. A13 – Section sketch of Cahergall Fort, open vs. enclosed.

Fig. A14 – Cahergall Fort's interior seen from the wall. (Wikimedia Commons, 2011)

Fig. A15 – Cahergall Fort's interior seen from the wall. (Wikimedia Commons, 2012)

Fig. A16 – Steps integrated in the wall.

Fig. A17 – Entrance passage. Inevitably, the symbolism of a time machine comes to mind. One's view of the other side of the entrance is blocked, increasing the mystery.

Fig. A18 – One enters an enclosure, emphasised by the circular shape. There is nothing but walls and sky. The sturdiness of the walls contrasts with the openness of the sky.

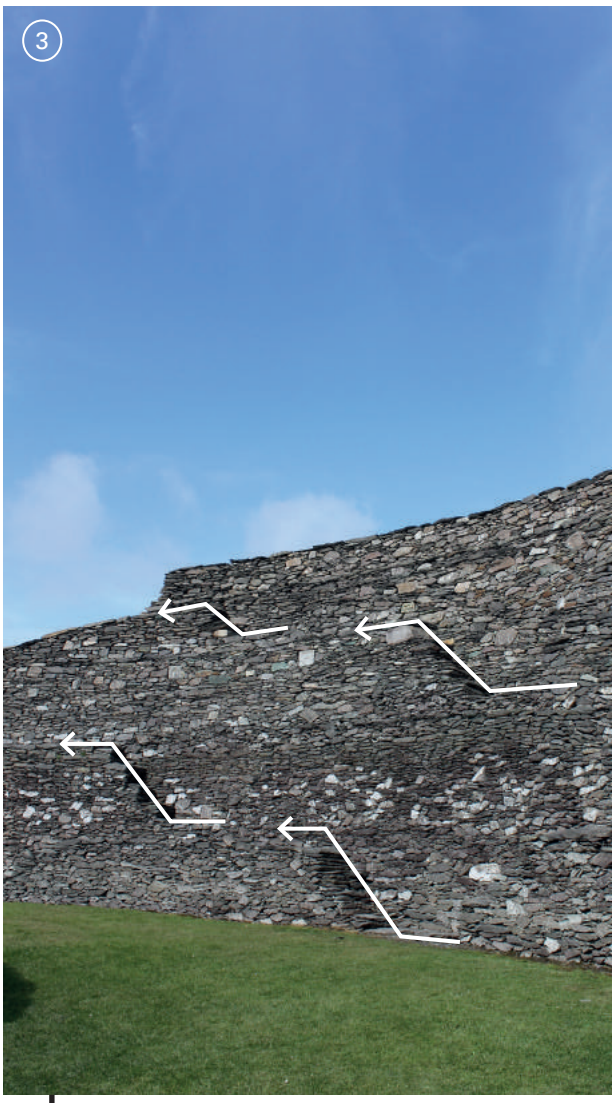


Fig. A19 – Surrounded by "ways out", the stones of the walls are stacked in such a way that they form small steps up.

Fig. A20 – Moving upwards, one looks down, the stones can be loose or slippery.

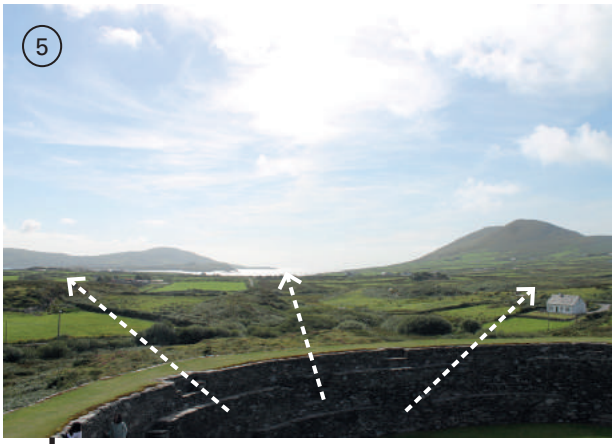


Fig. A21 – Then, looking up, one is suddenly met with a far-reaching view that contrasts with the seclusion of the interior.

Temples of Paestum

Location	Paestum, Salerno, Italy
Construction	550-450 BC

Fig. A22 – Joseph Mallord William Turner, 'Paestum under a stormy sky', c.1825, London, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings (Jong, 2014, 61).

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, two Neapolitan architects instigated the rediscovery of three pre-Roman temples in Paestum, a former Grecian colony south of Naples. At the time, the magnitude of the ancient Greek temples was completely unlike anything that anyone had ever seen and they caused great confusion. Their bulky columns and heavy pediments did not fit the then prevailing Roman and renaissance traditions of elegance and harmony. This bewildering rediscovery went hand in hand with a new appreciation of architectural experience and the rise of the sublime. Diaries on and drawings of Paestum provide a look into the enormity and rawness of the first reflections on the sublime.

The case of the Paestum temples is interesting because for one of the first times, experience instead of aesthetic rules such as harmony and symmetry dominated the discussion (De Jong, 2014, 17). For more than a century after the discovery of Paestum, the magnitude and bulkiness of the temples, the vastness and emptiness of the surrounding 'truly horrible desert' and the negligence and obscurity of the ruins caused awe and even shock in its visitors.[1] Even in those – and they were the majority – who had already extensively studied drawings and texts about Paestum in folios before their visit. When reading diary reports and texts from those early visitors, it is striking how completely surprised and overwhelmed people of that era could still be by the sight of three temple ruins. I must admit that their

1 '*un si horrible désert*' is how Charles Dupaty described the temples' surroundings in his *Lettres sur l'Italie en 1785*, vol. II (1788). Paris, France: De Senne, p. 195. Citation by De Jong, 2014, 39.

Fig. A22 – Joseph Mallord William Turner, 'Paestum in a thunderstorm', c.1825. London, Tate Britain (Jong, 2014, 60)

Fig. A24 – John Robert Cozens, 'The two great temples at Paestum', 1782, watercolour and graphite, London, Victoria and Albert Museum. (Jong, 2014, 24)

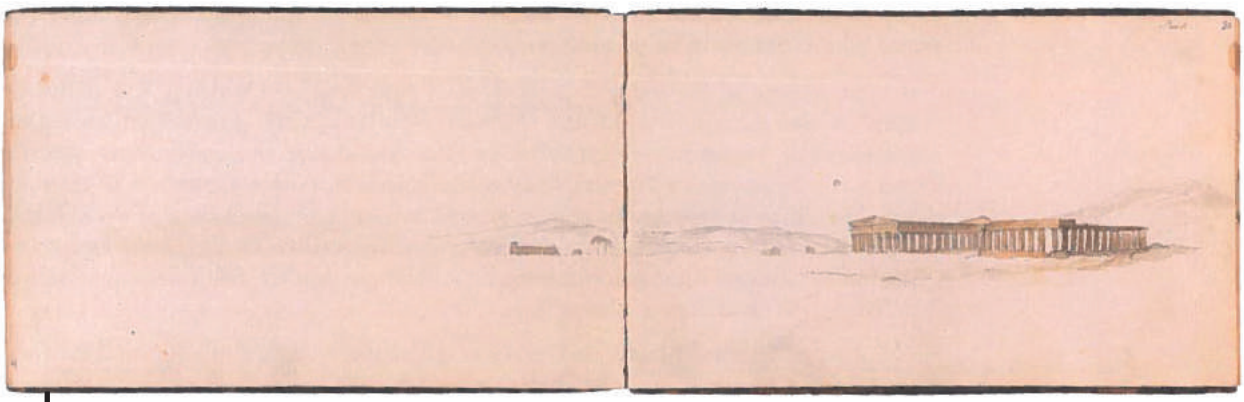


Fig. A25 –Thomas Hardwick, the temples at Paestum, 1778, sketchbooks from his Italian journey. London, Royal Institute of British Architects, Drawings and Archives Collection (Jong, 2014, 33)

powerful descriptions cause some melancholy in me: in the present-day world of multi-media and limitless technological advancement, I fear that such raw emotion and surprise is lost to us.

To the eighteenth-century visitor, the temples and their origin caused great confusion. No longer could they dwell on their Vitruvian knowledge and they were torn between abomination due to the 'badness of the architecture' and astonishment caused by the essentiality and power that the temples expressed[2]: 'my mind became so much expanded from the contemplation of Columns of such grand dimensions that I received an impression I have never forgotten. The Greek were a wonderful people. They knew too well how simplicity with vastness & continuousness produced sublimity.'[3] 'Sublime' appears in descriptions of Paestum all the time and the temples provided the perfect case study for all of Burke's (who published his *Enquiry* ten years before the first English book about Paestum appeared) sublime characteristics: obscurity, emptiness, privation (solitude), vastness, magnitude, uniformity, and infinity (of time as well as space).

2 'badness of the architecture' is a quote of Lord North in a letter to Charles Dampier, 1-9 September 1753, Warwick County Record Office. Citation by De Jong, 2014, 17.

3 Charles Heathcote Tatham. Citation by De Jong, 2014, 40.

G.N. Brandt's Ordrup garden

Location	Ordrup, Copenhagen, Denmark
Construction	1916
Architect	Gudmund Nyeland Brandt

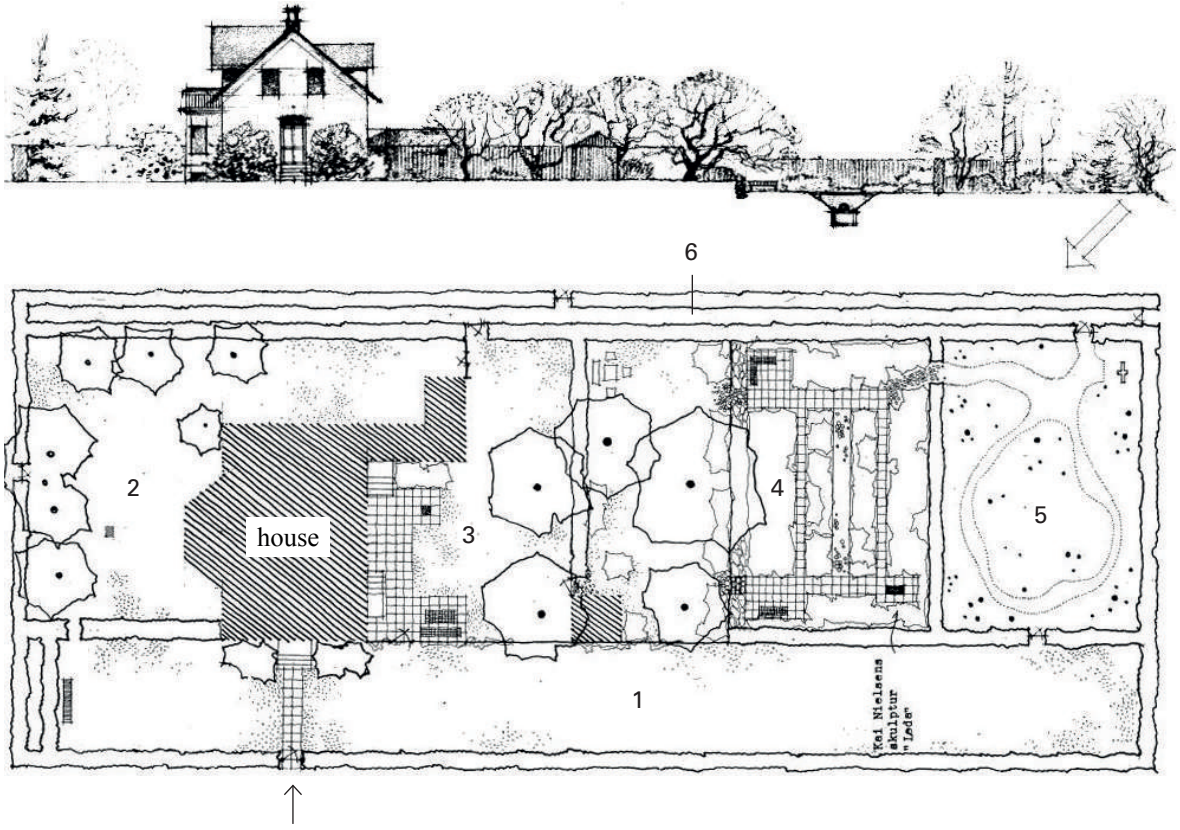


Fig. A26 – Black-and-white drawing of Brandt's garden by Aksel Anderse (Danish Design Review, n.d.)

G.N. Brandt, a Danish landscape architect, experimented in his own small garden (1600 m^2), which he divided into various garden rooms divided by cut hedges (Hauxner, 2001, 40). The main entrance from the road leads one through a narrow winding path lined by shrubbery and low trees (not on the drawing), where one is encouraged to leave life outside the garden behind (threshold). A high gate brings one through to a narrow but long garden room (1) laid to lawn, with a bench on one side from where one can stare into the distance. From this lawn, one could once enter the house, but this is no longer there. The front garden (2) is the only garden visibly accessible from outside, as the small gate here comes out on the Ordrup Cemetery (also designed by Brandt). The fourth area is divided into two segments, one with low trees, lawn and a small, open garden house, the second richly vegetated with all sorts of flowers and plants. In the middle is a narrow, rectangular pond cast in concrete, but overgrown by plants, and fed by water trickling from a simple pipe. The last garden room (5) consists of a circular path in a micro-woodland. The south-eastern side of the garden is lined by a narrow buffer zone (6). Connections between the rooms are sparse, but important. It was Brandt's intention to create the impression that one was in an infinite sequence of gardens (Hauxner, 2001, 40).

Brandt's gardens combine the soothing effect of rich flower beds, the enclosure of the garden room typology, the movement away from surrounding suburb life and the invisibility of the outside world, with the more intense sensory experience (the long and narrow field, the trickling of the water in the concrete pond, the circular walk in the wooded garden room), seeming infinity and other-worldliness. Interestingly, he plays with various forms of natural settings, ranging from the wildness of the fifth garden room, to the clipped back hedges and lawn of the first.

Fig. A27 – Entrance. Winding path from road functions as a signifying threshold. The visitor is prompted to leave one world behind and consciously enter a new one.

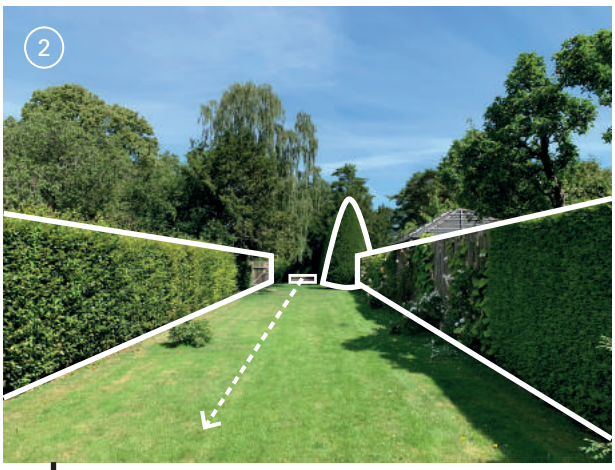


Fig. A28 – Room 1. Slight slope emphasises infinity. Staring into distance, undisturbed by visual hindrance. Hedges block the outer world.

Fig. A29 – Room 2. Front lawn, the tiles refer to the contours of former house. The low gate connects the garden to the cemetery east of the garden.

Fig. A30 – Room 4. The water trickles in the pond (almost invisible underneath the rich vegetation). High diversity in fauna. Various nooks in this garden provide space to wind down.

Fig. A31 – Room 5. Woodland room. Narrow, winding path among free-growing, low trees. Circular path allows one to make continuous loops through this garden.

Fig. A32 – Room 6, a narrow path, seemingly even longer than the lawn room (1), provides a buffer between the garden and the cemetery fields.

Wasserkrater Garden

Location	Aqua Magica, Bad Oeyhausen, Germany
Construction	1997-2000
Architect	Agence Ter

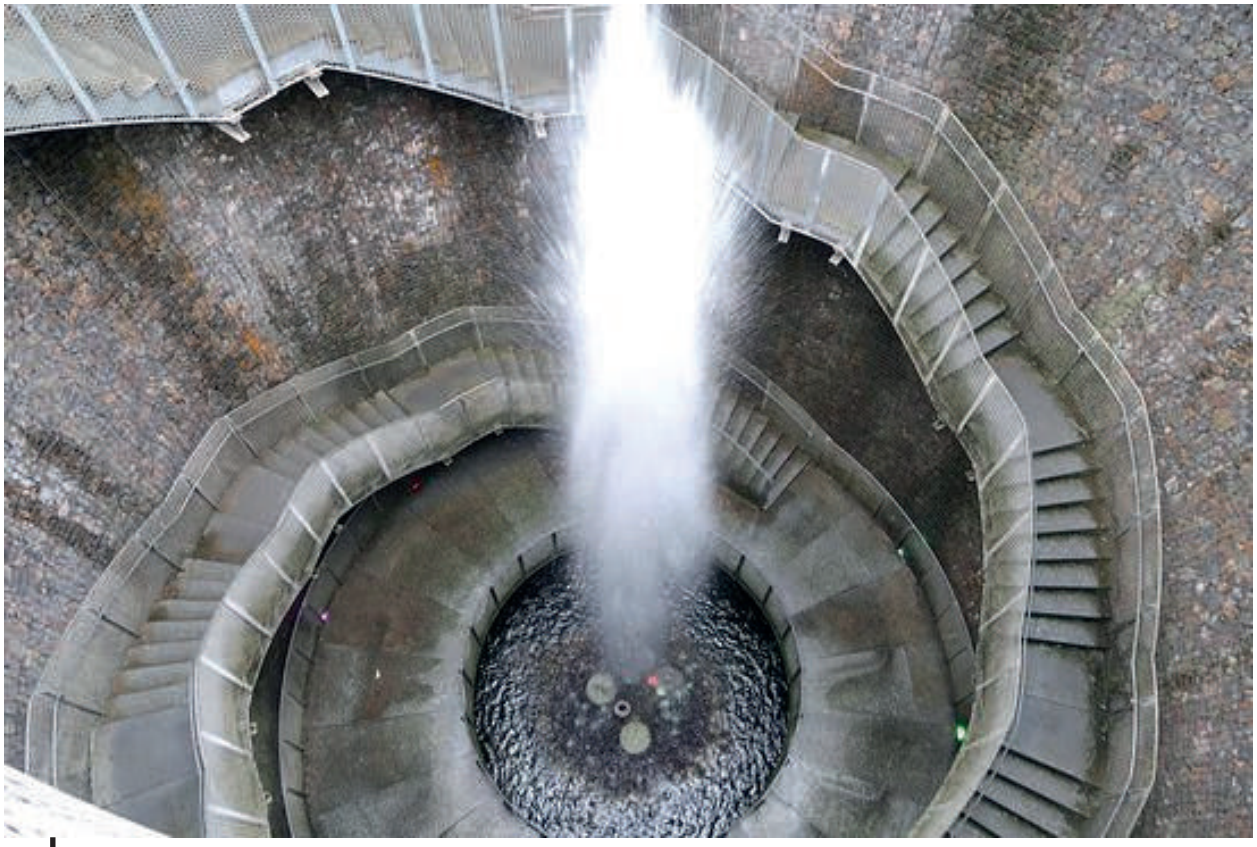


Fig. A33: the crater is connected to a subterranean spring. Sound and light effects accompany the water fountain (Wikimedia Commons, 2008)

Wasserkrater Garden lies in a public park in Bad Oeynhausen and celebrates the subterranean water that was once the source of this spa town's wealth. At the centre of the park – which consists of a sequence of park and garden spaces – the water sprouts from a circular crater, set within a circular valley covered with service berries. Reaching the border of the valley from the park, one sees the steel walls of the crater above the valley forest, from where, occasionally, the water forcefully sprouts up. Descending into the valley, one loses this overview and follows, secluded underneath the service berries, the scattered narrow stepping stones towards one of the two openings in the steel wall. Here, one can descend deeper into the earth by a spiral staircase that circles around the fountain. Water jets up in irregular intervals, accompanied by light and rumbling sound effects, evoking 'the sheer force exerted by the pressure of water in the bowels of the earth' (De Wit, 2014, 111). The sensory experience is overwhelming; the feeling of being below grounds emphasised by the increasing darkness, the rough stones of the walls and the damp smell (De Wit, 2014, 321). Here, being present – through the stunning sensory qualities – and being away – from daily life, buried into the earth, secluded in the high, circular crater and with the surrounding valley as a second threshold – contrast strongly. Above all, at sudden, unpredictable moments, the water roars and echoes up through the crater. Burke considered expressions of power one of the main initiators of sublime terror, and wrote: 'Wheresoever we find strength, and in what light soever we look upon power, we shall all along observe the sublime the concomitant of terror, and contempt the attendant on a strength that is subservient and innoxious [harmless].' (Burke, 1757, 89)

Fig. A34 – From the edge of the valley, one cannot judge the depth both of the valley and of the crater. Occasionally, the fountain shoots upwards and one hears the echo of the roaring water. (aquamagica.de, n.d.)

Fig. A35 – Down in the valley, the visitor submerges himself in the dense forest of service berries and follows the track of irregularly placed narrow rectangular stones. (aquamagica.de, n.d.)

Fig. A36 – After a while, you reach the entrance to the crater. Still, it is difficult to anticipate the depth and power of the fountain.

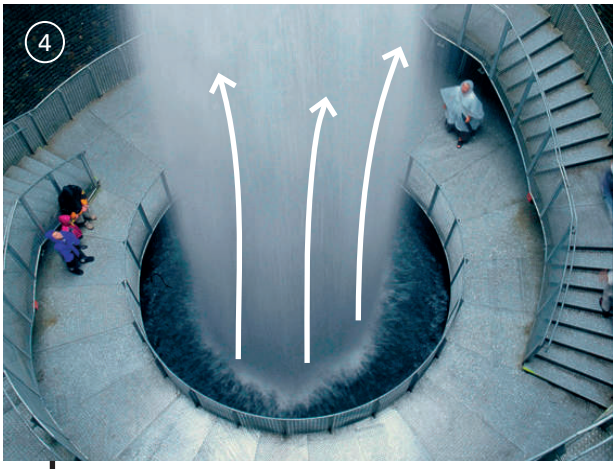


Fig. A37 – Entering the crater and looking down, you are met with a circular space, lined by two spiralling staircases, centering on the powerful fountain in the middle. (aquamagica.de, n.d.)

Fig. A38 – Making your way down, you are enveloped by the industrial, earth-like atmosphere of the dark, damp stones.

Fig. A39 – At the bottom, all you see of life outside the crater is sky. The fountain and the anticipation of its burst are ever dominant.

Hortus Conclusus, two (modern) examples

Project	Serpentine Pavilion
Location	London, UK
Construction	2011
Architect	Peter Zumthor
Garden design	Piet Oudolf

Project	Priory Emmaus
Location	Maarssen, The Netherlands
Construction	1957-1966
Architect	Jan de Jong
Garden design	Karin Blom van Assendelft (2019)

Fig. A40 – Zumthor and Oudolf's *hortus conclusus* in the rain (Urszula Kijek, 2011)

Fig. A41 – *Hortus conclusus* of Priory Emmaus.

In medieval monasteries, the *hortus contemplationis* captured the perfectly ordered representation of nature, reflecting the 'spiritual, harmonious world' and providing a setting for the monks to retreat (De Wit, 2014, 39, 108).

The two enclosed gardens presented above are more modern, but were designed for the same purpose: a small, orderly world away from everyday chaos in which one could reflect on life or simply wind down. Physically, they have a lot in common: both consist of a rectangular courtyard filled with lush plants and flowers but restricted to a certain plot, surrounded by a roofed walkway from where one can contemplate this small section of "ordered" nature. Both are turned inwards, with only a few points of access and surrounded by a threshold or buffer space. They are based on a strong contrast between the wildness of nature and the sobriety and austerity of the architecture that surrounds it. Both offer a sanctuary from life outside and present the idea of infinity within the enclosure.

The Serpentine pavilion by Zumthor and Oudolf was located in the heart of London, in Kensington Gardens, in the summer of 2011. Walls and roofs are constructed of timber, clad in black woven jute. From the park, a landscape of grass, a high variety of trees and axial paths, one can enter the pavilion through one of six doors. The visitor enters a stark corridor-like space, a threshold between city life and sanctuary, between vast park and small garden, from where he arrives in the lush garden designed by Oudolf. The cloister lining this garden provides shelter and places to sit in the shadow and sun, allowing one to withdraw into the safety of the darker border. The garden is artificial (as in: the species are not related to climate or soil) and inaccessible, presenting an sublimated, perfected image of nature and reinforcing the other-worldliness of the place.

Priory Emmaus was designed by Bossche School architect Jan de Jong (a student of Hans van der Laan, whose design for Abbey Roosenberg is one of the main case studies for this research). De Jong's aim was to build a monastery of a 'decidedly sober' nature: 'we refrained from adding anything that was not strictly necessary' (Jong, 1967, 25; translation by VT). In fact, the cloister garden that he designed was far more plain and rational, with large square tiles, three rectangular plots for plants, and a cross. The garden changed multiple times since then, adding more plants, brick flooring, spaces to sit, vegetable plots, etc. The current lay-out was designed by landscape architect Karin Blom van Assendelft and consists of a non-symmetrical, rectangular design of five differently shaped plots and a small square in the middle, connected to the outer ring by four paths, with the cross of De Jong and several simple benches. Some of the plants and flowers are used in the restaurant that

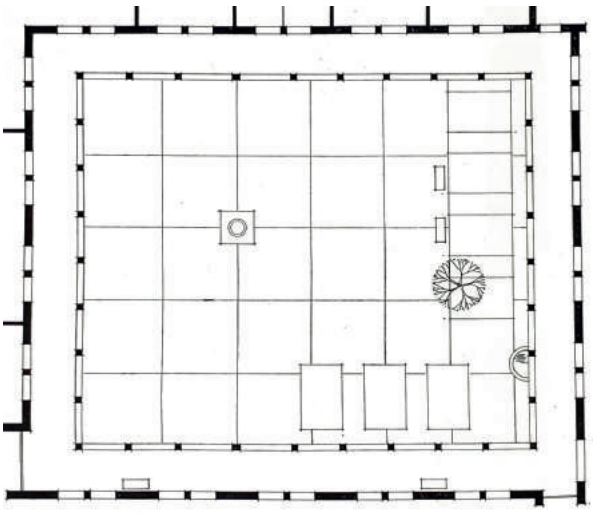


Fig. A42 – A plan of the original design for the cloister garden by Jan de Jong (De Jong, 1967, 28)

Fig. A43 – The cloister garden shortly after the monastery's construction in 1966 (De Jong, 1967, 29)

Fig. A44 – Both gardens are located within the walls of a complex that is situated in a park setting (Walter Herfst, 2011)

Fig. A45 –The *hortus conclusus* of the Emmaus Priory lies enveloped by the large complex, shielded from the estate's park

Fig. A46 – In both cases, one accesses the garden through a in-between corridor, lining the entire or part of the garden. (Julien Lanoo, 2011)

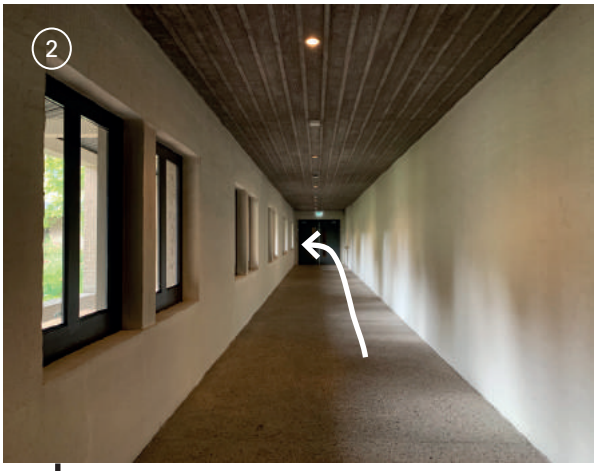


Fig. A47 –The Serpentine garden is more accessible through six doors, the Emmaus garden only through two.

Fig. A48 – From the cloister of the Serpentine, one gets an obstructed view of the garden (Wikimedia Commons, 2011)

Fig. A49 –The view onto the garden of the Emmaus priory is framed by brick columns and a low wall.

Fig. A50 – In both cases, the gardens are primarily intended as viewing gardens. (Walter Herfst, 2011)

Fig. A51 – But at the priory, the garden also invites a more physical interaction.

is now housed in a part of the monastery. The cloister surrounding the abbey is clad in simple brick and lined with low benches and the restaurant's outside terrace.

Comparison and conclusion

Comparing the gardens, we see that at the Serpentine pavilion, the contrasts between inside and outside is stronger. Whereas the Emmaus Priory on the Doornburgh estate is set in the outer regions of the relatively quiet village of Maarssen, the Serpentine pavilion is located very close to Kensington Gardens' borders and right next to the busy West Carriage Drive. The transition is more abrupt, consisting solely of a narrow, dark alleyway, whereas one enters the Emmaus garden through the interior of the abbey. The black colour and coarse touch of the jute cladding of Serpentine contrasts strongly with the softness, colourfulness and lushness of Oudolf's garden, while the soft-coloured brick, light gravel and the variation of flowers in the Emmaus priory present a softer image. In addition, the Serpentine garden is very much an inaccessible image, something to be pondered from the shade of the cloister, almost not to be touched, while the Emmaus garden (in contrast with medieval monastery tradition) invites not only circumferential contemplation, but also entry into and physical interaction with the garden. Overall, the unexpectedness, suddenness and contrast of the composition, the starkness of the architecture and the confined, inaccessible representation of wild nature at Serpentine offers a more intense (sublime) experience, while the softness, harmony and accessibility of De Jong and Blom van Assendelft's composition prescribe a more soothing atmosphere. Most importantly, both *horti conclusi* offer a temporary, choreographed move from one world (the everyday, the usual) into another (the other, the utopian, the sanctuary).

Big Bang Fountain

Created	2014
Artist	Olafur Eliasson

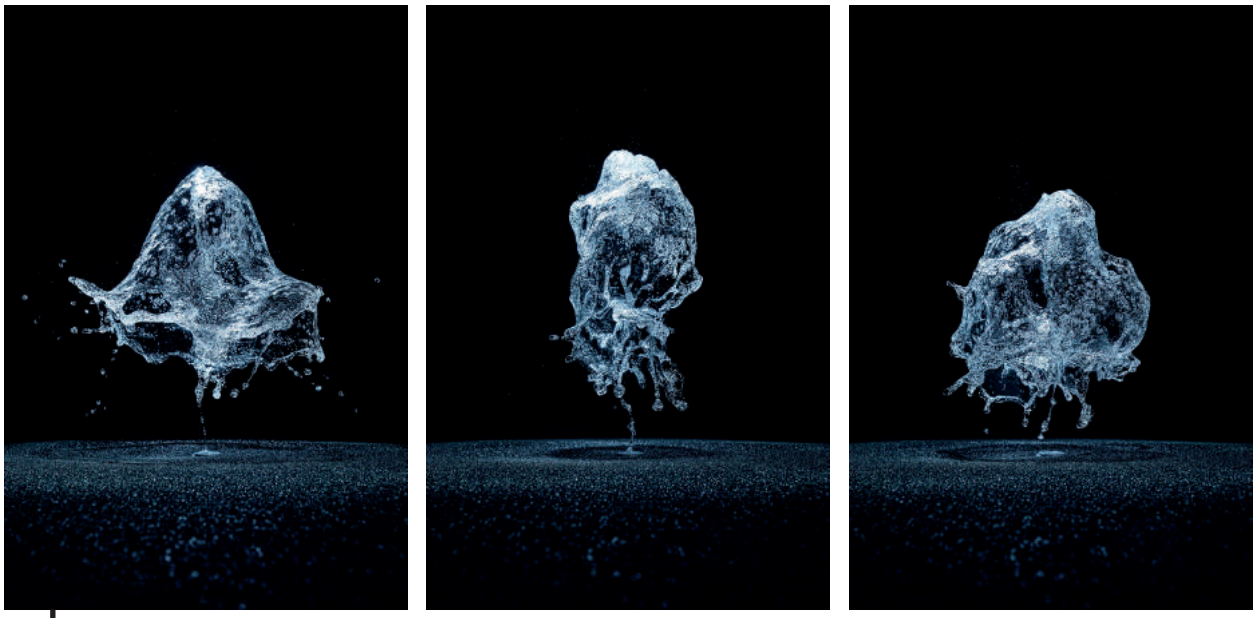


Fig. A52-54 – Big Ben Fountain (Anders Sune Berg, 2014)

This artwork is installed in a completely dark room, entered through a sequence of black curtains that make sure all light is kept out. This darkness presents a stark contrast with the surrounding museum and the visitor is presented quite suddenly with a sense of disorientation and powerlessness. At the same instance, one is overcome by an unusual incident further into the room. From the ceiling (one assumes) hangs a strobe light that illuminates what seems like a miniature iceberg below it in a rapid interval. After a while, one hears the trickle of bursting water. Carefully stepping closer to investigate, one notices that the iceberg changes shape at every interval and it is only then that everything adds up. One is, in fact, looking at a fountain of blue water. Its rapid bursts are illuminated at their apex for a millisecond, showing the water as if it was frozen in mid-air. The confusion, disorientation and sensory limitation that this artwork invokes has a startlingly overwhelming effect. This is followed by a sense of relief that comes with learning to understand the situation, and also the strange sense that one has become insider of a secret joke, which the people newly arriving into the room have yet to figure out. Powerlessness is replaced by power, but the mesmerising effect of the fountain continues its grasp on one's fascination.

ESSAY 3

Scene, stage, act

Facilitating modes of interaction

Research and texts on restorative and contemplative environments tend to regard the effects of the environment on man as a unidirectional relation. That is to say: they propose a certain organisation and characterisation of the environment that invokes, in a one-way direction, feelings of tranquillity and contemplation in the visitor. The environment as object and man as subject are positioned apart from one another. Their relation is reduced to the effects of the first on the condition of the latter. We see this not only in the already discussed research of Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, Appleton and Ulrich, but also in more practice-based views, like the essays in *Contemporary Landscapes of Contemplation* by Rebecca Krinke (ed., 2005). There is, however, another voice in this discussion, which focusses on horticultural therapy and thus the active interaction *between* man and the environment. Research on the effects of horticultural activity points out that gardening is considered to be a rewarding and meaningful occupation, that 'gives a feeling of well-being, total commitment, and forgetfulness of time and self' (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002, 63). The desired level of active interaction between man and landscape depends on the resilience and mental state of the first. Stigsdotter & Grahn propose a model that defines the needed environment according to an individual's mental power:

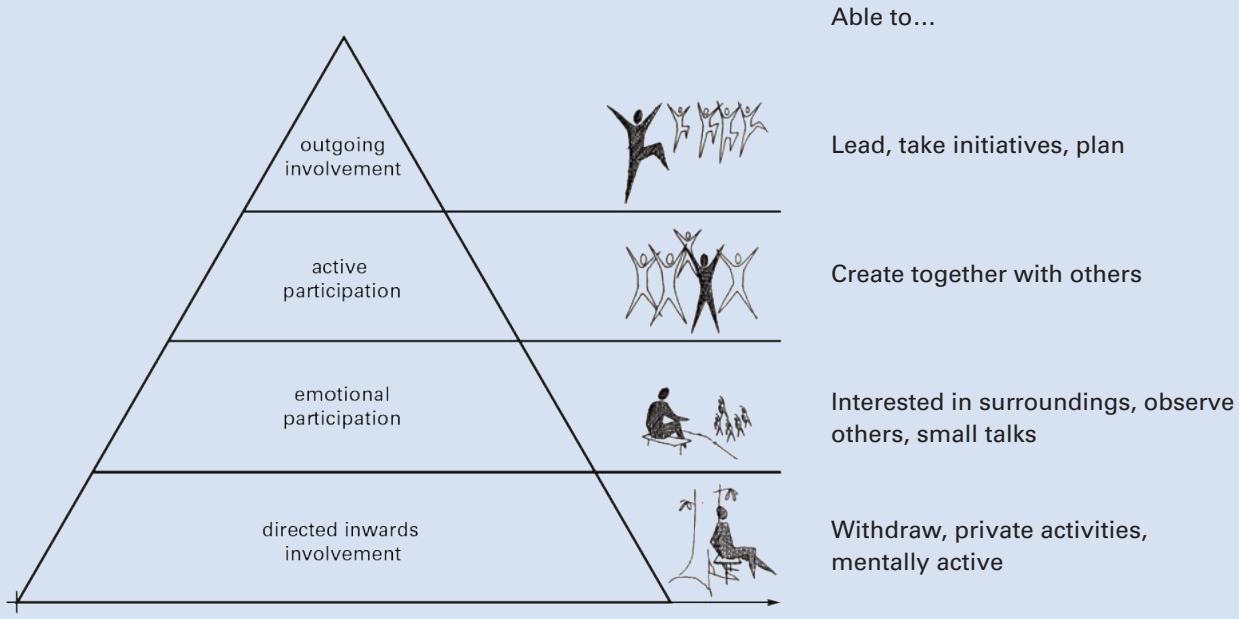


Fig. A55 –Type of involvement depending on the individual's mental power (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002, 64)

The model ranges from the most passive to the most active involvement. In the first case, at the bottom of the pyramid, individuals are mentally turned inwards and wish to not be disturbed by outer impressions. 'He is not alone, but instead together with himself' (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002, 65). The top category allows for high-intensity outer impressions, active collaboration and even leadership. An effective and thus desired restorative environment should cater for

visitors of all levels of mental power (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002, 65). The model of Stigsdotter & Grahn focusses on social interaction, on the need to withdraw from or collaborate with other individuals, distinguishing their approach from the environment-based studies and essays mentioned in the introduction of this essay. The latter often regard man as a solitary visitor, or do not acknowledge the presence of other individuals at all. Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan do take interpersonal interaction into consideration, but limit this to 'human sign': 'although indications of human presence can be a source of concern, human sign is often reassuring' (1998, 37).

When it comes to interaction in a contemplative setting, three things are important: the characteristics of the environment, the activity of its visitors and the interaction between these visitors. In this essay, we will bring these components, that have thus far been treated predominantly separately, together. I would like to propose, inspired by the model of Stigsdotter & Grahn, a new fourfold categorisation of the contemplation experience. One that ranges from passive to active – or more accurately, inwards to outwards – interaction, and incorporates different modes of interaction.

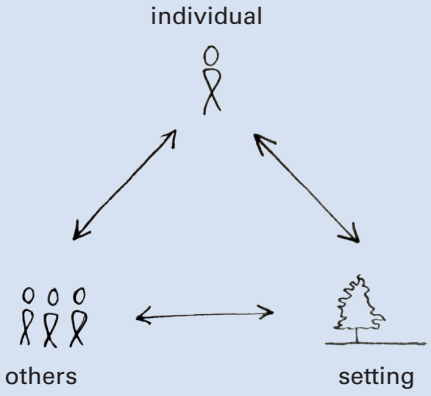


Fig. A56 – Scheme of components of the *bezinnings*-landscape

Fig. A57 – Scheme of modes of interaction between individual, others and setting

There is no hierarchy or order; each category allows for similar levels of tranquillity and contemplation, just through different modes. With this subdivision, I do not wish to propose a divided landscape: it is possible and even imperative that the *bezinnings*-landscape as a whole includes more, if not all, settings.

What follows is a short discussion on each of the four proposed modes of interaction. The examples discussed allow us to study the characteristics of the architectural and landscape-architectural environment that facilitates these modes of interaction.

Interaction through perception

A powerful example of a garden to look at and ponder is Ryoan-Ji in Kyoto (fig. A58), one of many so-called dry Zen gardens. It consists of an enclosed field of raked pebbles and fifteen

Fig. A58 – Ryoan-Ji garden (Wikimedia Commons, 2004)

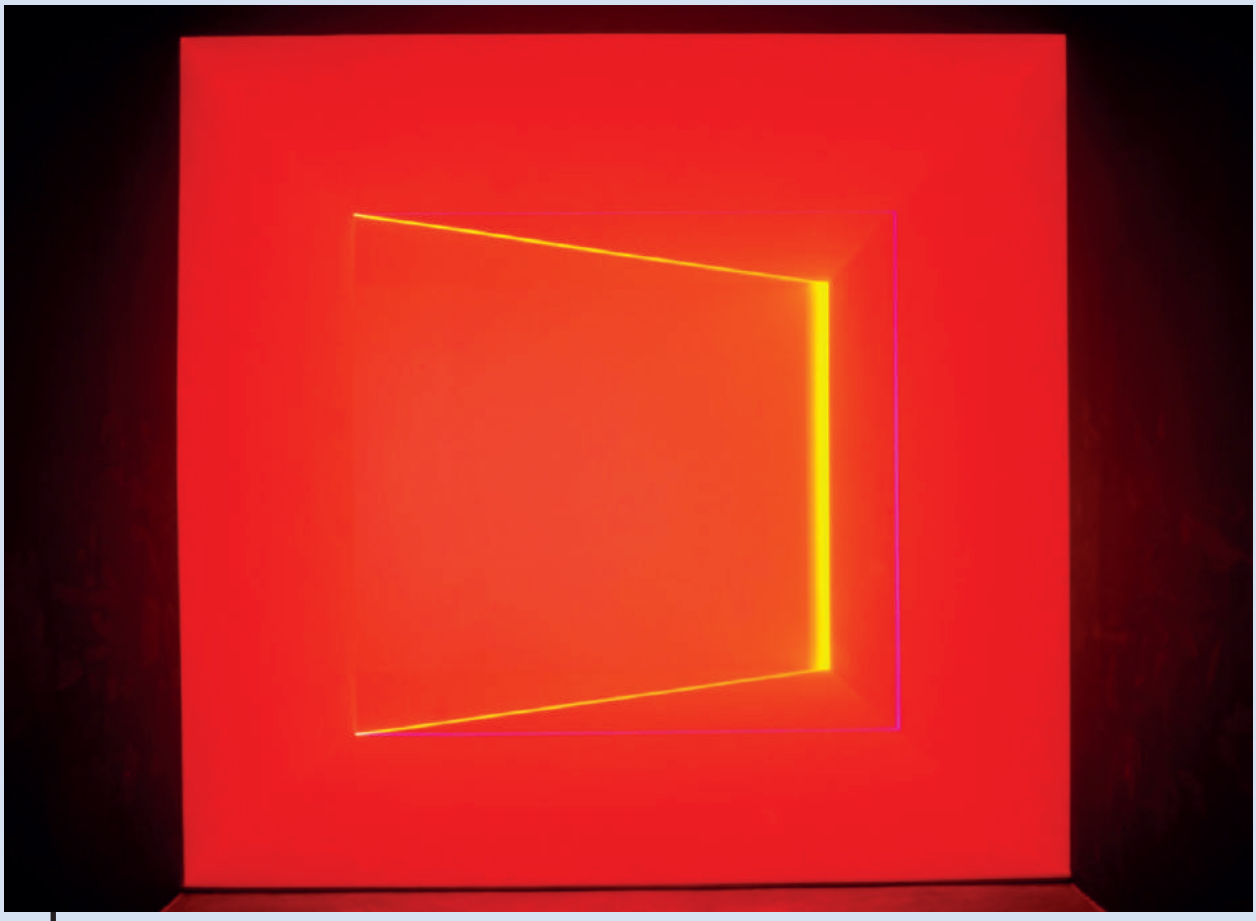


Fig. A59 – James Turrell, Milkrun III, 2002, Spectral Wedgework, neon, Almine Rech gallery.

Fig. A60 – Teshima Art Museum by Ryue Nishizawa and Rei Naito (Noboru Morikawa, n.d.)

Fig. A61 – Ira Keller Fountain in 1995 in Portland, Oregon, by Lawrence Halprin & Associates (Wikimedia Commons, 1995)

rocks of varying sizes, to be observed and contemplated in a seated position by monks and visitors from a long veranda that runs across the length of one side of the garden. This dry Zen garden has a highly symbolic meaning: it is impossible to see all fifteen stones at once from any point on the veranda, heightening – within a small enclosed garden – a sense of infinity and signifying 'the human inadequacy to know all things' (Treib, 2005, 14). The garden also functions through a more direct influence of space on observer as a vehicle for contemplation. Its ancient design is based on the idea that contemplation implies a high degree of concentration and a reduction of rustle. 'The simplification of the dry garden [...] is much like closing one's eyes.' There is little to make sense of, allowing one to 'exchange things physical for those metaphysical' (Treib, 2005, 15).

The Christian monastery garden, surrounded by a rectangular cloister from where monks and visitors can contemplate the cloister's interior, has a similar effect (Krinke, 2005, 112). More modern examples play with this highly involved mode of perception, too, either rendering a highly "reduced" setting or providing mysterious elements and symbols that invoke a particularly focussed exploration. Essentially, both instances encourage to deepen one's attention and stimulate a similar concentration to be performed internally. We can find this combination in the Reflection Garden in the Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island, Washington. This garden, part of a larger sequence of landscapes within the Reserve, consists of a rectangular pond, surrounded by well-kept lawn and hedges. At the head of the pond is a bench (there used to be more on the other sides of the pond) from where one can observe the garden. This small hidden-away landscape functions as an aid for contemplation both directly and metaphorically. One can simply revel and find depth in the simplicity and visual reduction of its composition, or focus on the more symbolical infinity and elusiveness of nature and life in general (Krinke, 2005, 121; De Wit, 2014, 82-83).

In James Turrell's artwork, like *The Light Inside* and *Space That Sees*, the play of light and space seems at first to be deceivably simple, but is actually highly complex, challenging, symbolic and even overwhelming (Bearsley, 2005, 186). I once stumbled upon one of Turrell's *Spectral Wedgeworks* (*Milkrun III*) (fig. A59) in the Almine Rech gallery in London – 'an illusion of walls and barriers' in the artist's own words – and sat there watching it until my entire vision had become red and it felt like I had been transported weightlessly *into* the artwork, even though I was physically seated on a bench in a dark room, with a clear distance between me and the spectacle of light and shadow (Turrell, n.d.).

Landscapes and spaces within this category emphatically place the individual outside of the environment and focus on the relation or dialogue between the environment and the internal activity of the individual. An important characteristic of these landscapes is the synthesis of space and time: their spatial configuration often departs from the idea that it should be perceived over a longer period of time, and in this time, (slow) changes or a lack of changes should encourage one to slow down and stimulate a tranquil mode of contemplation (Beardsley, 2005, 185). Entire books could be, and are, written on the characteristics of this synthesis, but it is important to say a few words on one of them here, the Japanese concept of Ma (間). It is impossible to translate this word and do it justice. In a literal sense, it means something like space, empty place or even void (Nitzscke, 1988). The word shares its symbol with 'ken', meaning architecture, and is a combination of the symbol for gate (門) and sun (日), suggesting that a spatially defined area becomes meaningful only through the phenomena that occur in it. Ma is a combination of mass and emptiness, space and time, setting and activity. We can find its power in many places; noteworthy examples are Teshima Art Museum in the Seto Inland Sea, Japan by Ryue Nishizawa (see fig. A60), the *Lightning Field* in Catron County, New Mexico, by artist Walter De Maria and the works of Luis Barragan (Beardsley, 2005).

Interaction through movement

When moving through a landscape, experiencing it from many viewpoints and connecting physical and psychological experience, environment and man become one. Through movement, the individual places itself inside the space and the interaction with the environment surpasses the sensory and metaphorical and becomes active and bodily. The landscape or space is inhabited and processed, rather than beheld (Wiley, 239). The dancer Anna Halprin describes this beautifully in her lecture 'Architecture and Dance', stating that much like dancers, architects are 'exploring and controlling space' (Merriman, 2001, 101).

> 'The only difference is that in the dance, the definition of space and the experience of space takes place at one time, because we are defining space with movement and experience space by movement. The architect, on the other hand, must define space first with materials, and then that space becomes a living force only when people can move around in that space and experience it through their movement.' (Anna Halprin, 1943, 2, quoted in Merriman, 101)

Halprin says here that movement creates space and is in this way synonymous to the act of design. The architect has a responsibility to choreograph this landscape in a way that both determines and facilitates the movement of its visitors. If done well, our lives could, in the words of Anna's husband, landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, 'be given the continuous sense of dance' (1949, 34) (fig. A61).

In the choreography of movement and the design of the route, the designer has many tools at its disposal; width, gradient, route, underfoot texture, to name but a few (Hunt, 2004, 146). In 'The Role of Movement in Garden Perception', John Dixon Hunt distinguishes three main typologies. The first is procession, or ritual movement, characterised by a preordained path, infinitely retraceable, with a determined purpose and socially or spiritually prescribed experience. The objective is higher than the performance of the walk itself (Hunt, 2004, 149-157). The second category is stroll, which takes place within a site and consists of a defined route between incidents that guide and choreograph the movement. More than the procession, the overall experience of the landscapes and its features is the main objective (Hunt, 2004, 157). Lastly, Dixon Hunt distinguishes the ramble, the least orchestrated movement of the three and promoted by the will of the individual. On a ramble, it is all about exploration and the action of walking. Purpose and destination are not important, the ramble requires impulsiveness and spontaneity (Hunt, 2004, 158).

Interaction through active involvement

In the fourth century BC, an Athenian philosopher called Epicurus founded a school outside of his city's walls, known as the Garden. Epicurus did not relate to the ideas of another important founder of a school nearby, Plato, and considered happiness, not justice, wisdom or successful participation in public life, to be the ultimate objective of education and life in general. The state of *ataraxia* – which translates as peace of mind, or spiritual tranquillity – was the one and only important goal in life, and this state required systematic discipline and devotion. His Garden school, which was an actual garden, taught pupils about nature and its cyclic rhythms of growth and decay. Through cultivating the garden and contemplating its behaviour, one could cultivate the mind. Like the garden, the state of ataraxy requires 'constant vigilance and intervention' (Harrison, 2008, 75).

Similar approaches are researched today. Stigsdotter and Grahn quote various studies into the health effects of garden work (1998, 63). The act of gardening in itself is considered to

be accessible, meaningful and rewarding. The physical work often has a meditative effect and becomes harmonious with the individual's mental state, stimulating contemplative cognitive processes. 'Demands and possibilities in the environment give a feeling of well-being, total commitment, and forgetfulness of time and self' (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 1998, 63). One can imagine other modes of similar synergies – painting, sculpting, bird-watching and foraging, for instance – in which the landscape and the individual interact physically, psychologically and physiologically. Such activities generate either a strong awareness of and relation with the environment, but are simultaneously routine and even elemental in a pleasant way. They require what Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan refer to as soft fascination, a kind of presence and attention that is almost unlimited in its capacity (1998, 18).

In the landscapes of this category, man and environment join as one mechanism in a two-way, physical and emotional relation, working together through inspiration and production.

Interaction through social engagement

The Epicurean view is strongly apolitical, anti-materialistic and anti-individualistic. To Epicurus, pleasure – the ultimate goal in life – comes from patience, hope, gratitude, temperance and courage, but most importantly, from friendship, conversation, suavity (as in: generosity) and consideration of others (*epikeia*), in other words: from one's social attitude and engagement (Harrison, 2008, 76-78). Socrates shared this view on the value of interpersonal conversation. In one of Plato's texts, he says that writing is similar to painting in the sense that 'they understand what they are saying, but if you ask them what they mean by anything, they simply return the answer over and over again' (translation by Walter Hamilton, Harrison, 2008, 61). Only intellectual conversation and *synousia* (long partnership) could lead to knowledge, truth and happiness.

Socrates' position disregards the conversations to be held internally. I have noticed in my observations, most importantly in Kasteel Slangenburg (see case study #3), that valuable conversation is indeed comfortable and often helpful, but it is the alternation and even more so, *the choice*, of being alone or together that is most appreciated. The landscape of contemplation should spatially facilitate and cultivate the rhythm of turning inwards and outwards, of deepening and broadening one's view, of individuality and collectiveness. This should not be designed as a world of two extremes, alternating places where one can be alone with places where one is inevitably all together, but a sequence of spaces that allow for personal preference and 'a gradient of settings' with different degrees of intimacy (Alexander, 1977, 610).

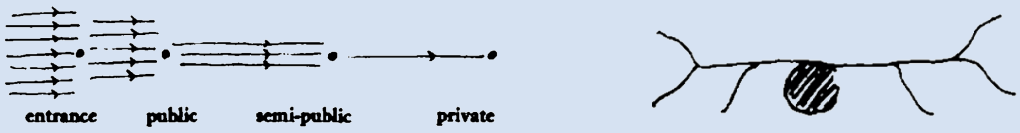


Fig. A62 – Schemes from *Pattern Language* for a gradient of privacy and the central yet voluntarily accessible location of the communal space
(Alexander, 1977, 610, 636)

Communal spaces should be located at the heart of a landscape or building – not on the circulation space, but tangent to it, so that it is easily accessible, but not too forced or exposed – while more private spaces are increasingly closed-off and remote. Answering to the need to be "alone together", there should be in-between spaces, like niches or alcoves, that provide people to withdraw within collective spaces. We find interesting examples in Villa

Müller by Adolf Loos in Prague (fig. 65, 66) and in the METI School by Anna Heringer in Rudrapur, Bangladesh (fig. A63, 64). But we also find it in an outdoor setting in Museum Insel Hombroich, where half-hidden nooks in dense vegetation provide a moment to withdraw. In all three cases, the "alcove" is enclosed on three sides, smaller in height than the room it is connected to and softer in texture or material, but it also still part of a larger room, keeping its inhabitant in touch with the surroundings.

Setting

In the four schemes that were used to introduce the modes of interaction at the beginning of this essay, "space" and "environment" were, for the purpose of clarity, reduced to a horizontal line and a tree. Although this essay focusses on the users of this landscape, we have learned – from Halprin, Hunt, Epicurus, etc. – that the organisation, characterisation and atmosphere of the environment is of vital important in facilitating these interactions and that it is the role of the architect to "choreograph" them. In facilitating modes of interaction, the setting can be divided into three main typologies: scene, stage and performance, two of which I derive from the dissertation of De Wit (2014).

1. Scene. Landscapes and spaces in this typology facilitate contemplation through distance and abstraction (De Wit, 2014, 338). They are detached from the observer and undemanding, allowing the observer to turn inwards.
2. Stage. Here, a more active interaction is encouraged. This landscape or space functions as the setting for actions of the visitor, who moves through it, meets others in it, or withdraws within it (De Wit, 2014, 340). Whereas the typology of the scene functions mostly on a visual level, this typology triggers a more multisensory approach (De Wit, 2014, 340).
3. Act. Here, the environment is no longer a facilitating backdrop, but it becomes the visitor's equal. It provides and inspires. Not the atmosphere, emotion or activity it stimulates, but the elements, composition and presence of the landscape itself becomes the object. Visitor and environment become one, in the sense that they act collectively.

It will be one of the challenges for the design process to study the spatial possibilities and details of these three typologies.

Conclusion

In every way, the landscape for contemplation should be inclusive and thus diverse and well-balanced. It should lend itself as a tranquil object of observation, as a stage set for movement, as a place of inspiration and cultivation and as a backdrop of conversation. It caters for moments of privacy, small meetings and larger gatherings, for introspection and conversation, for mental and for physical activity. It recognises personal preference and the volatility of this preference.

At the same time, it should render a certain atmosphere and prescribe a form of behaviour that is fitting to the contemplation experience. This combination can be tricky. At least within Dutch landscapes, one is never alone, and some measure of societal rules that enable us to live together harmoniously still applies. We will see in the case study of Kasteel Slangenburg how prescriptive and still welcome these rules can be, but we must also follow examples set by people like the Halprins and Peter Zumthor and recognise that these rules can be more plausible and incontestable and less domineering if prescribed by architecture and spatial configuration.

Fig. A63 – Cave-like alcove in Anna Heringer's Handmade School in Rudrapur, Bangladesh (Kurt Hoerbst, n.d.)

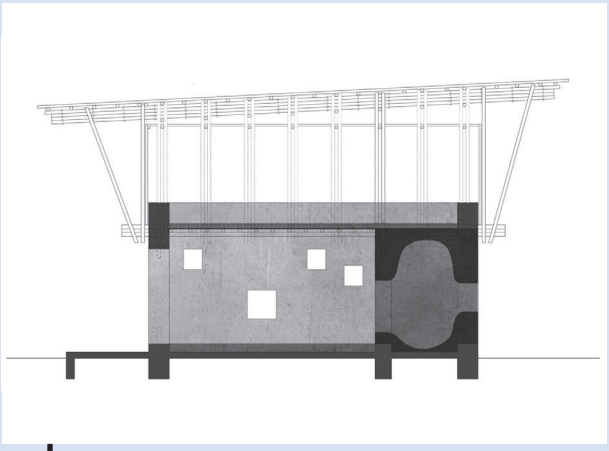


Fig. A64 – Section of Handmade School in Rudrapur (Anna Heringer, n.d.)

Fig. A65 – Alcove Zimmer der Dame alcove in Villa Müller in Prague by architect Adolf Loos (Martin Gerlach, n.d.)

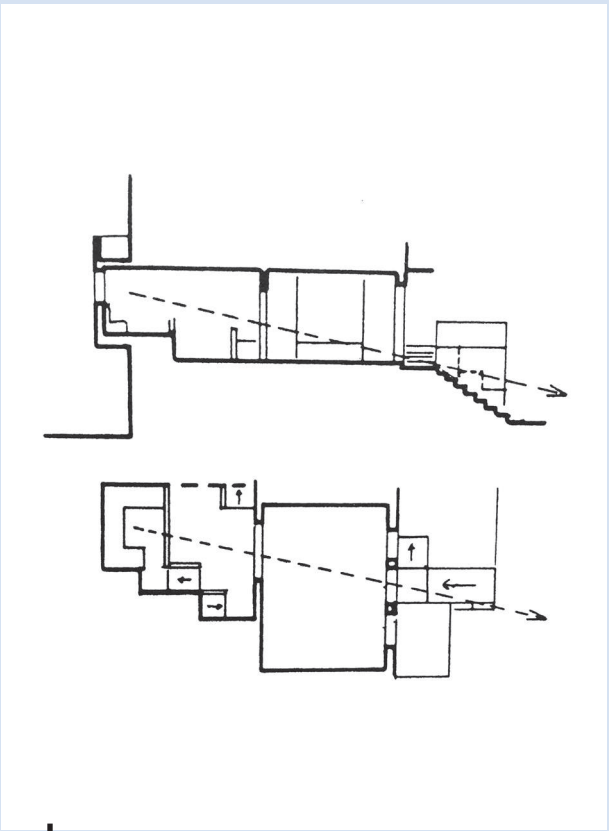


Fig. A66 – section (above) and plan (below) of alcove in Villa Müller (Max Risselada, 1988)

SECTION B

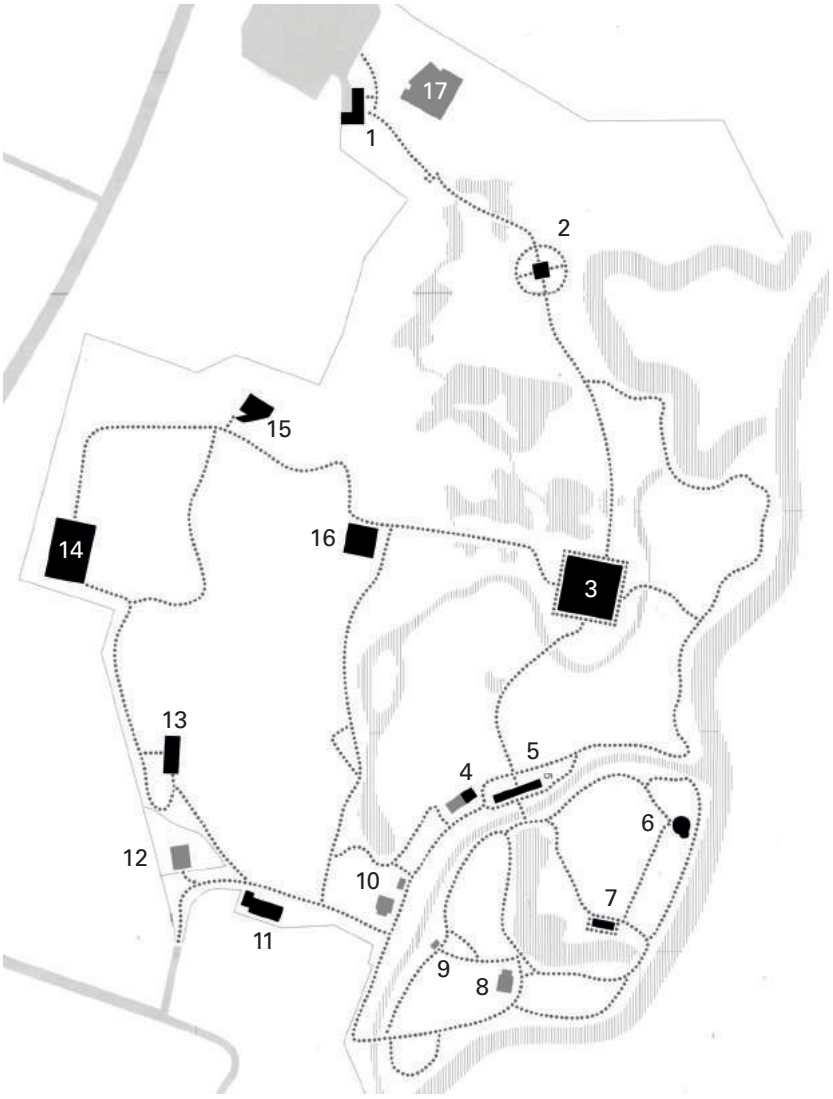
CASE STUDIES

Fig. B1 – South entrance of Lange Galerie

CASE STUDY 1

Museum Insel Hombroich

Location	Neuss, Germany
Construction	1980s
(Landscape) architect	Erwin Heerich, Bernard Korte, Herman Müller, and others
Initiator	Karl-Heinrich Müller



1. Entrance
2. Turm
3. Labyrinth
4. Anatol's Studio
5. Lange Galerie
6. Graubner Pavilion
7. Orangerie
8. Rosa Haus
9. Soumagne-Klause
10. Kutscherhaus
11. Scheune
12. Kinder Insel Hombroich
13. Tadeusz Pavilion
14. Grosse Galerie
15. Schnecke
16. Cafeteria
17. Graubner Studio

New pavilions

Existing buildings

Fig. B2 – Plan of Museum Insel Hombroich

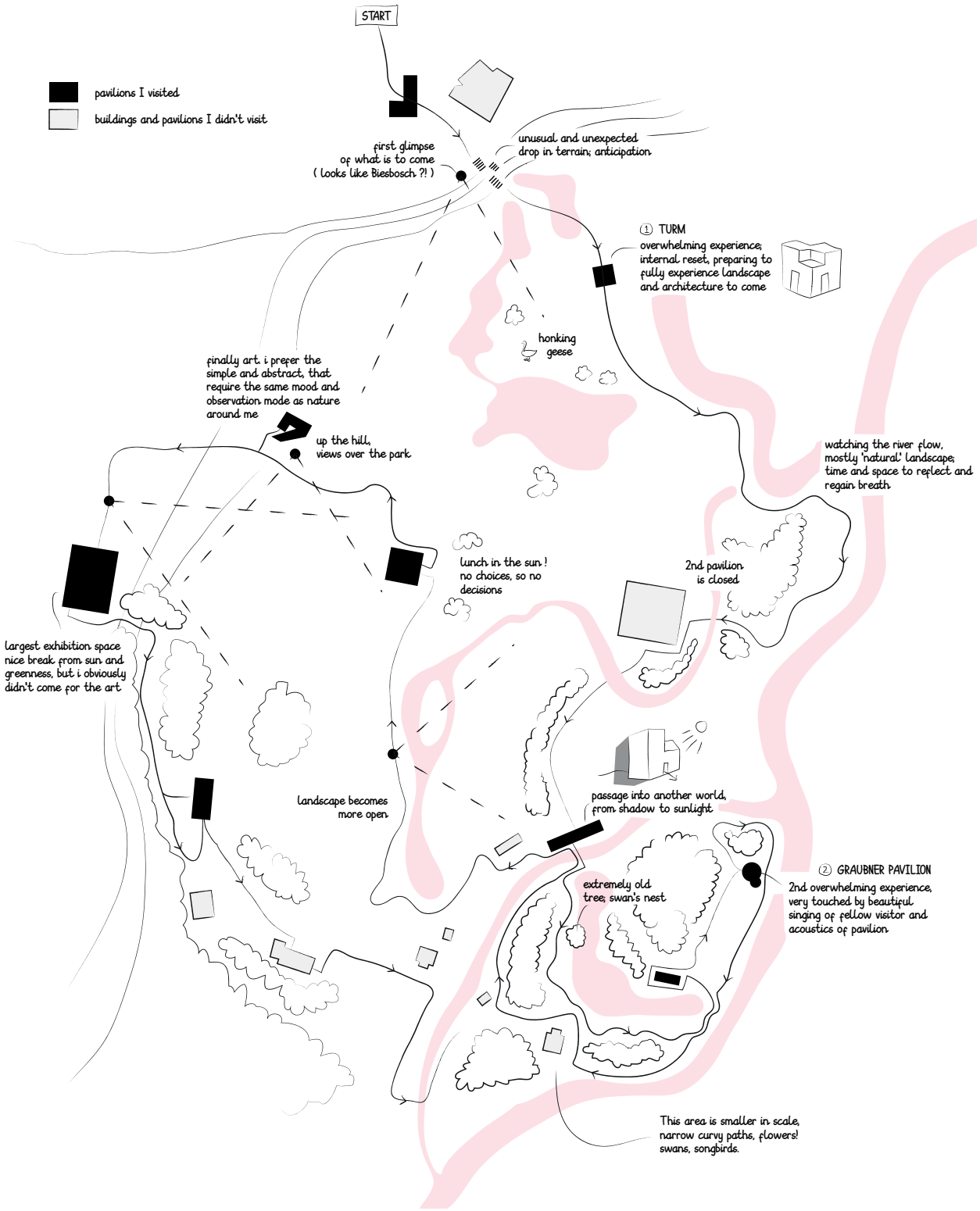


Fig. B3 – First impression in Insel Hombroich (30 March 2019)

Encounter 1, outside first pavilion
I see a woman in hiking attire through one of the doors of the first pavilion (Turm). She is looking out over the park, with her hands folded in front of her chest, like she is praying or in meditation. We meet outside and she shows me pictures on her phone of the flowers in the park in summer (it is now March). She comes here at least once every season, and loves to see the landscape change. Her favourite spot is on the island, secluded by the trees, on a small bench looking out over the pond.

Encounter 2, inside first pavilion
A women's choir. I hear them from outside and hurry in. They have just finished singing, but they start again for me. When I close my eyes, it is as if I am in a vast church space – the echo bouncing of the walls and up to the roof lights – but we are all very close together. When they leave, some smile at me. Alone now, I test the acoustics and sing to myself. It's soothing, powerful and eerie at the same time.

My experience feels like a last-minute operation on my mindset, to get me in the right mood to experience the museum park as fully as possible. Somehow, I feel lighter.

Encounter 3, inside the double-circular pavilion
In another pavilion, Graubner, a woman is signing beautifully. We are alone, but she is clearly in another world and does not notice me. I close my eyes, and she sings *Ode an die Freude* and other German songs. It is very moving.

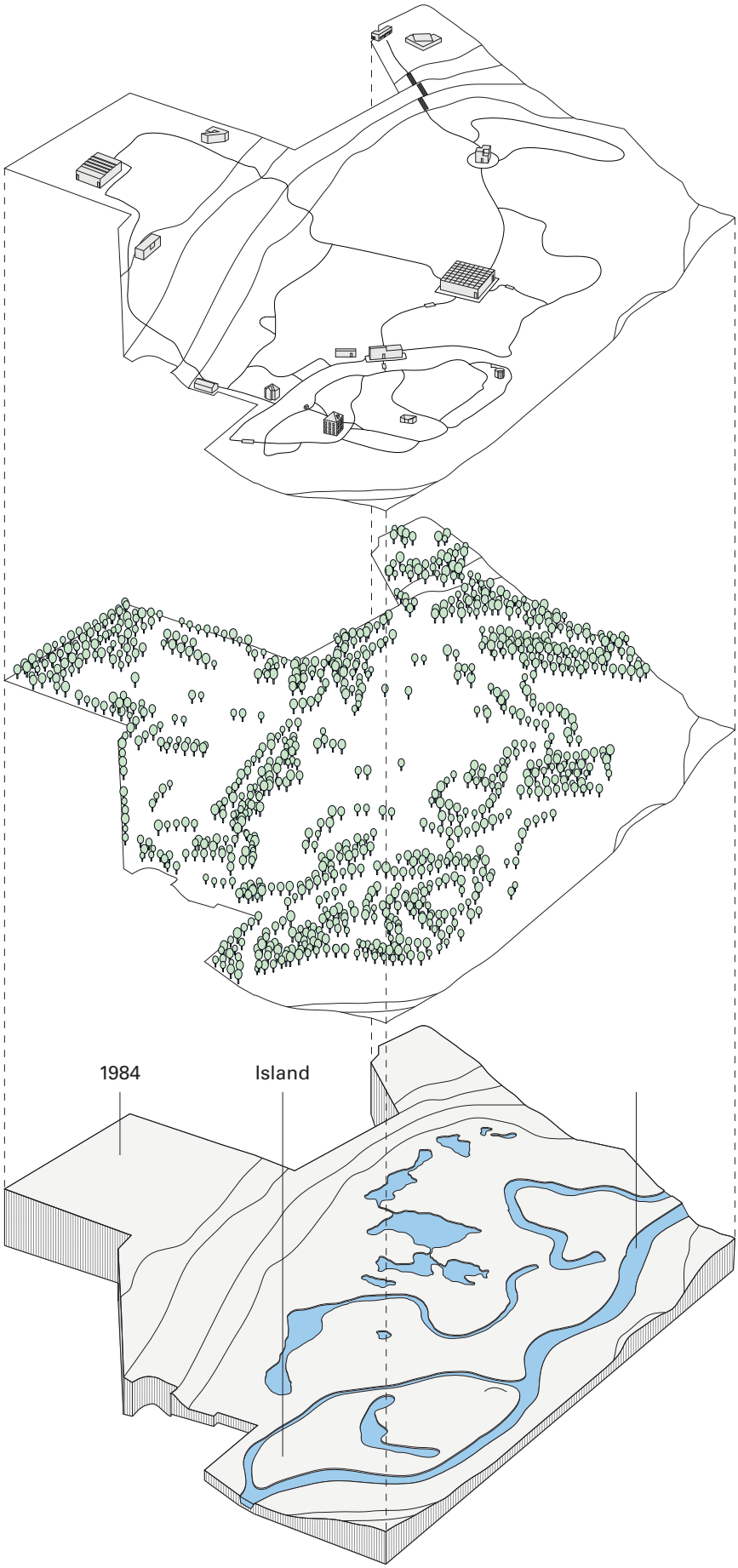


Fig. B4 – Layers of the landscape

Before the museum

In 1816, a wealthy industrial family from Wuppertal built a country estate in the marshes of the river Erft, adjoined by a geometrically articulated garden with formal axes extending far into the surrounding countryside, as was fashionable at the time. Over the course of the century that followed, the land around the estate was excessively industrialised and cultivated by agricultural and mining industry, and later, in the Cold War period, it became an executive battleground of the Cold War – a world of wired fences, bunkers and missile bases (Restany, 1978, 12).

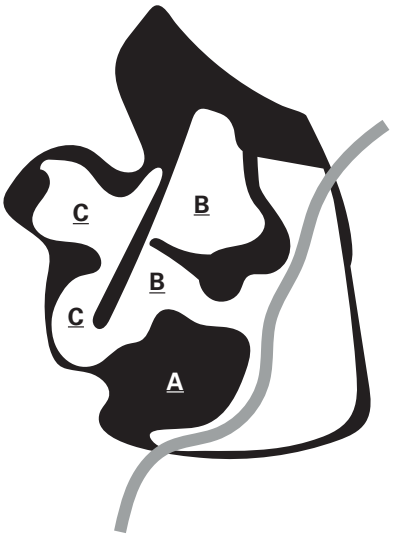
Museum Insel Hombroich

In 1982, when businessman and art-collector Karl-Heinrich Müller purchased 40 acres of this land, he became the owner of a feral and overgrown formal garden in the middle of a vast 'agricultural steppe' (Granitsas, 1990, 60). Planning to build a museum to house his art collection, he assigned sculptor-turned-architect Erwin Heerich, together with painter Gotthard Graubner, art dealer Sami Tarica and agronomist and landscape architect Bernhard Korte, to transform the site into a place where visitors could experience 'art parallel to nature' (Granitsas, 1990, 58). Aim was to uncover the pre-industrial landscape and add a museum of pavilions to house Müller's extensive art collection with a design that understood architecture should be subordinate to both art and nature (Granitsas, 1990, 60).

Two years later, work still in progress, Müller purchased adjacent land further up the river bank, expanding his vision. Later still, in 1994, he purchased the former NATO missile base north-west of the Museum Insel, and assigned a number of architects, among whom Alvaro Siza and Daniel Liebeskind. In between the two parks is now Kirkeby-Feld, also part of the so-called Kulturraum Hombroich, comprised of another five pavilions. This case study focusses on the original Museum Insel, due to its varied landscape and design approaches, and the similarities of both the landscape and the experience with the design assignment in the Biesbosch.

The park consists of various landscape typologies, speckled with both old and new buildings – dubbed 'walk-in sculptures' by Heerich and 'chapels in the landscape' by Müller (Granitsas, 1990, 60). This *Gesamtkunstwerk* is admired for its pure, sentimental and romantic gesture and often compared to the English landscape gardens of Capability Brown (Restany, 1987, 13; Weilacher, 2005, 75). Indeed, the simple and geometrical outlines of the pavilion amidst a carefully orchestrated composition of vegetation and slopes may easily remind one of a Claude Lorrain painting, but this landscape has not been designed as a picturesque panorama to be admired as a painting, but as a place to move through and activate the senses (Kastner, 1996, 39).

Fig. B5 – Schematic map distinguishing the visually and spatially open from the closed.



Müller wished for a garden as beautiful as Monet's Giverny, but in dialogue with the existing and historical characteristics of this particular landscape, resulting in three different landscapes (Granitsas, 1990, 60; Kastner, 1996, 35).

A. Park

The area of the abandoned and overgrown axial garden became a diverse and densely vegetated parkland. Landscape architect Korte emphatically refrained to act out of 'aesthetic piety' and to forcefully manicure the garden back to its former glory (Weilacher, 2005, 75). Instead, he worked 'in dialogue with nature', embracing the naturalisation of the garden, reintroducing former streams and ponds and preserving the exotic and vernacular vegetation, such as court oaks, copper beeches, a bald cypress with a girth of 5 meters and the now overgrown hedge boxes of the formal garden (Meyer, 2010, 70).

B. Meadow

A different approach was applied to the river banks north of the island, where more drastic measures were required in order to answer to Müller's vision. Through aerial photographs, old maps, on-site excavations and pollen analysis, Korte strived to bring back the wetland landscape of the early nineteenth century (Granitsas, 1990, 62). The tulip and corn fields were transformed back into an artificial floodplain-like landscape (similar to the landscape in the Biesbosch) with osier trees, streams, marshy ponds, wild flowers and water animals (Kastner, 1996, 34). Ancient river branches that had disappeared underground were dug up. Ponds were created, swamp fauna reintroduced.

C. Garden

With the extension of 1984, Korte introduced a third landscape typology. Located on the higher slopes of the river banks, this section was more open, with wide vistas over the somewhat older parts of the park, sloping meadows, terraces and orchards (Kastner, 1996, 35).

The park is now composed of a densely vegetated park (the former island), a meadow left largely to its own devices and a more open garden landscape, knitted together by the uniform architectural language of the pavilions, winding paths and the surrounding slopes of the valley. Today, the three 'differing components of a landscape culture both raw and tamed' are still apparent in the experience and provide for different moods and behaviours (Kastner, 1996, 35). What follows is an analysis of the spatial components of the three landscapes, focussing on entrances, landscape morphology, vegetation, architecture in relation to the surrounding landscape and seating.

Contrasting entrances

Fig. B6 – Only two entrances: either through pavilion (left) or over bridge (right). Pavilion stands as wall between two zones, shadow on one side...

Fig. B7 – ... wildness, flowers and sunshine on the other side.

Hidden amongst the trees

Fig. B8 – Pavilions are small and hidden in the landscape. Relatively open, but only one entrance, visual connection with immediate surrounding landscape.

Strong visual relation with nature

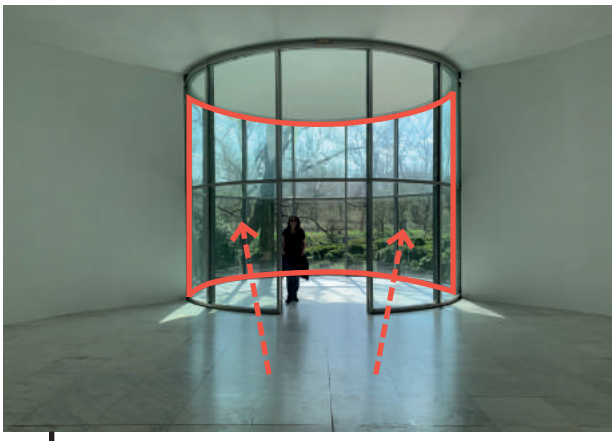


Fig. B9 – Large openings in the facades frame the surrounding landscape and create a more intimate relation with the natural setting.

Secluded landscape

Fig. B10 – Fine network of narrow, winding paths, high variety of vegetation, limited vistas, small water features.

Wild-growing vegetation

Fig. B11 – Overgrown remnants of the formal garden: hedge boxes, ancient and exotic trees, geometrical lay-out.

Hidden nooks

Fig. B12 – Simple, backless benches are hidden in small clearings and behind large trees.

Entrance: Explicit view and movement into valley

Fig. B13 – First glimpse into valley, emphatically hovering above the landscape, before consciously descending into the experience. Transition in mindset: threshold.

Landmarks

Fig. B14 – Glimpses of the pavilions through or above the trees guide visitor through the landscape.

Small fields, natural landscape

Fig. B15 – Small fields, predominantly natural elements, typical for lower-Rhine wetlands, flowing river, small ponds, narrow paths.

Framed and enclosed landscape

Fig. B16 – Trees and other vegetation frame vistas, limited visual range, enveloped by the slopes of the valley and trees.

Spatial integration of architecture in landscape

Fig. B17 – Pavilions are designed as one with the surrounding landscape. Hedges form a second wall around the Labyrinth pavilion...

Fig. B18 – ... and the Turm pavilion is anchored into the landscape by two strong visual axes.

Semi-hidden seats

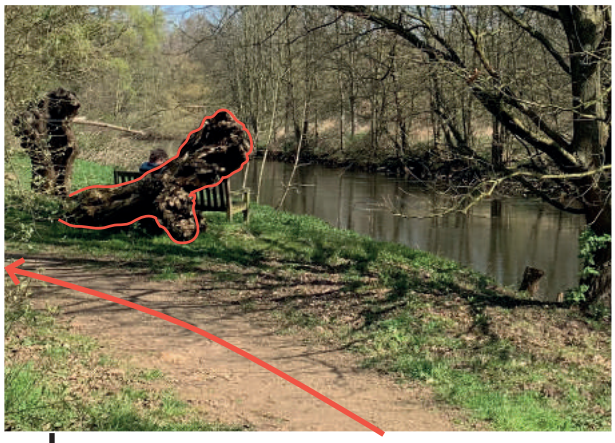


Fig. B19 – Classical benches close to the path, half-hidden, looking out over the river and ponds.

Landscape morphology

Fig. B20 – Open fields, wide views, low horizon, higher up the slope...

Fig. B21 – ... interchanged with winding paths and dense vegetation.

Formal elements

Fig. B22 – Lanes with trees on both side, ending in pavilions or art pieces, and...

Fig. B23 – ... osier plantations in grid structure.

Internalised pavilions

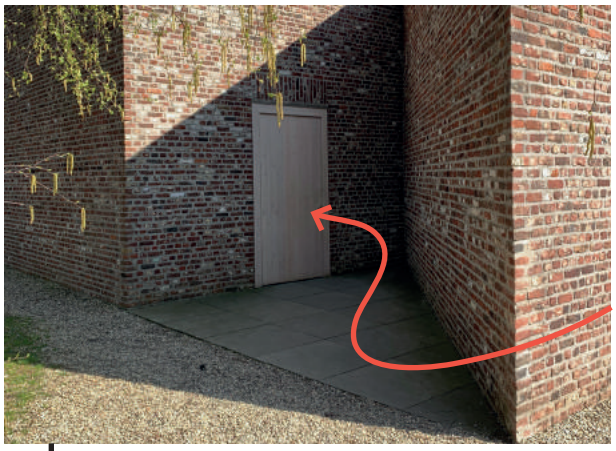


Fig. B24 – Internalised and inward architecture, closed facades, few and hiddden entrances. Pavilions as landmarks in open fields.

Seating out in the open

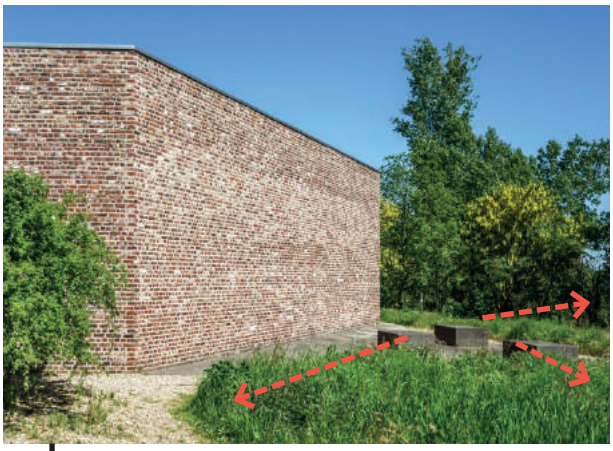
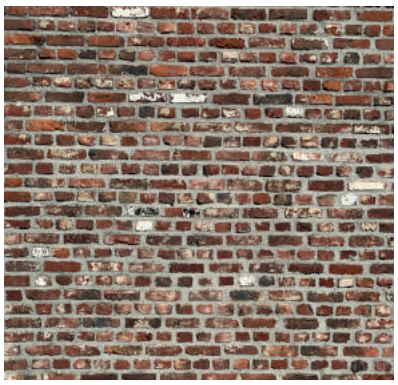


Fig. B25 – Contemporary seating blocks with open views over landscape.



Reused brick

Titanium-white walls

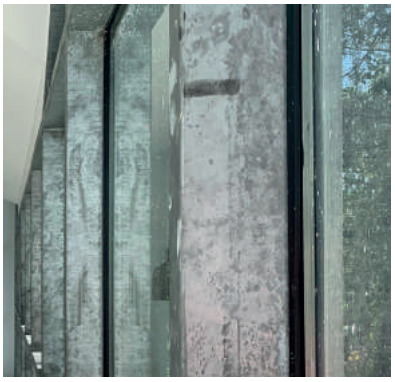
Marble slab floors

Pinkish wooden doors

Wooden construction elements

Wooden bridges

Glass facades



Metal frames

Metal window frames

Metal framed skylights

Wooden construction elements

Heavy steal doors

Fig. B26 – Materiality of Hombroich's pavilions and structures

Fig. B27 – Sequence from outside to inside: change of colours and hardness of materials and contrast between natural forms and strictly straight-lined geometry

Heerich himself stated that he was entrusted with the task of designing the pavilions because he was a sculptor and not an architect, and would therefore understand that the art should never be subordinate to the architecture of the museum (Granitsas, 1990, 58). The pavilions he designed, with the technical support of Hermann Müller, are similar in material – old bricks from a derelict Dutch factory building, simple cornices, glass planes in metal frames, natural stone floors and stark white walls (see fig. B25) – and in geometrical simplicity (Kastner, 1996, 37). None of the pavilions have artificial lights. All interiors are painted a highly-reflective Titanium white, to emphasise the contrast between interior and exterior. The simplicity of the pavilions is an important characteristic. It is present in the geometry, the application of only a small range of materials and the relative emptiness of the interiors in contrast with the lush gardens outside. This simplicity allows for one to focus on other things – like the gardens visible through the windows and the art exhibited inside – or to turn inward.

Awareness

Kastner celebrates Heerich's architecture for the way it 'transforms the acts of entering, walking and moving around his buildings into experiences of great significance' (1996, 39). Part of this is due to the unusual amount of sound one produces with every action. The buildings are designed in a way that 'incites a wish for acoustic exploration' (Zschokke, 1996, 99). Similarly, the high light intensity and white washed walls play on one's perception. The heavy steel doors (clad in wood on the outside) and the suddenness of the stark interior compared to the lavish plants and trees one leaves behind marks the entrance into an important event.

Different relations between interor and exterior ranging from open to closed

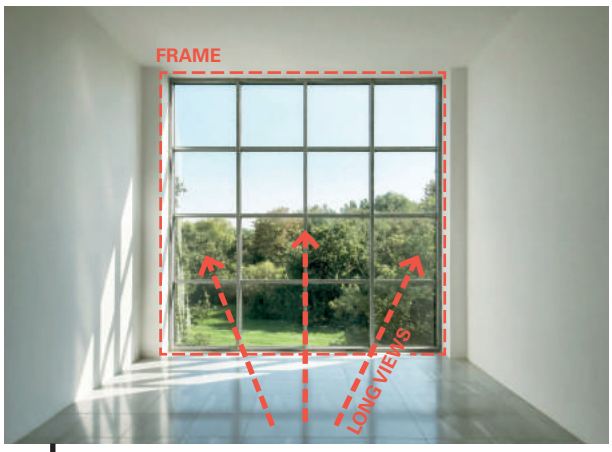


Fig. B28 – The view from the empty upper floor of the Tadeusz pavilion, out over the tree tops.

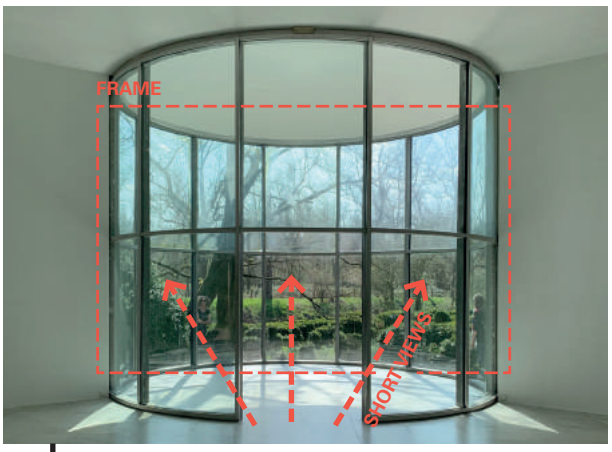


Fig. B29 – The interior of the empty Graubner pavilion, looking out over the feral garden in front of it.

Fig. B30 – View from the Vitrine pavilion of the pond, largely obstructed by plants and trees.

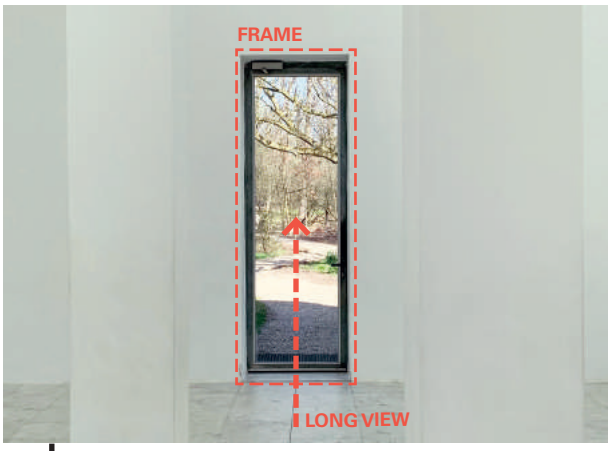


Fig. B31 – Narrow view from the Turm pavilion on the path extending into the park.

Fig. B32 – The interior of the Schnecke pavilion. The floor-to-ceiling window looks out on a small courtyard and is usually shuttered.

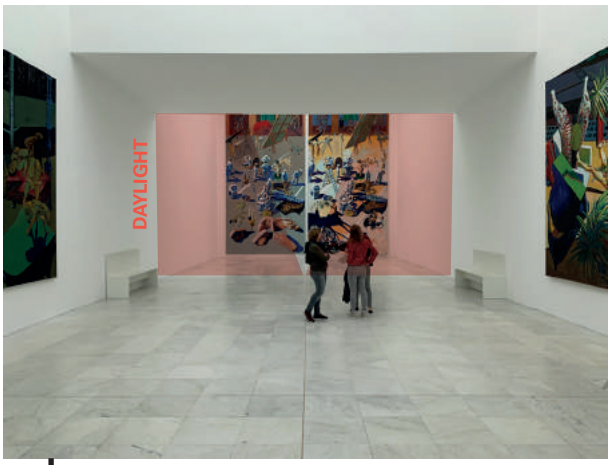


Fig. B33 – Exhibtion room on the lower level of the Tadeusz pavilion. Daylight floods in from the roof, the room is closed off from the surrounding landscape.

Each pavilion responds differently to its surroundings, adapted in size, openness and position according to the characteristics of the landscape. Some of the pavilions – e.g. Turm and Graubner Pavilion – hold nothing other than empty spaces and framed views of the surrounding landscape. An important universal quality of the pavilions' interiors is the way they encapsulate natural and sensory phenomena: the daylight falling through the skylights, the sounds and echoes of visitors filling the spaces and the breeze running between adjacent doors. Views of the surrounding landscape from the pavilions are usually limited, resulting in small, inward-focussed spheres of architecture and landscape. Some pavilions provide one with glimpses or short vistas of a pond, a small garden or dense vegetation. In contrast, some pavilions have large windows looking out over the landscape, allowing one to contemplate the view from one's position outside of it. (Zschokke, 1996, 66).

Fig. B34-35 – Interior of upper (above) and lower floor of Tadeusz pavilion

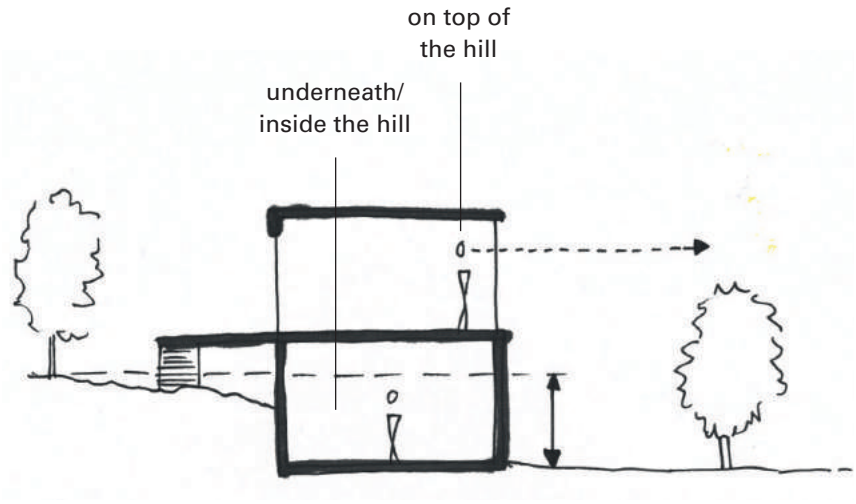


Fig. B36 – Section scheme of Tadeusz pavilion

What is interesting about the collaboration between Heerich and Korte is the way that the landscape and architecture reinforce each other and work together in the formulation of enclosedness, openness, direction and framing. They have been designed in such collaboration that they – even though the architecture's materiality and hard lines are in high contrast with the surrounding natural elements – blend together spatially.

A recurring pattern is the way high and dense vegetation or slopes augment the closed side or overall enclosed quality of a pavilion. In some pavilions, the spatial sequence they enfold – a labyrinth, a light-directed movement – is extended into the landscape. On the following pages, the relation between architecture and landscape of some of the pavilions is analysed in some simple sketch drawings.

Tadeusz pavilion

This comparatively medium-sized pavilion is situated at the bottom of a small hill. By introducing two levels, one fully enclosed, one framing a vista, the experience of the hill is extended in the interior. On the upper level, one is on top of the hill, emphasised by the view over the tree tops. On the lower level, one has descended into the hill, a cave-like room filled with large art pieces and the daylight flooding in through narrow slits in the ceiling.

Fig. B37 – Interior of the Graubner pavilion. Picture is taken from the ‘embracing’ circular space and looks out onto the glass garden room.

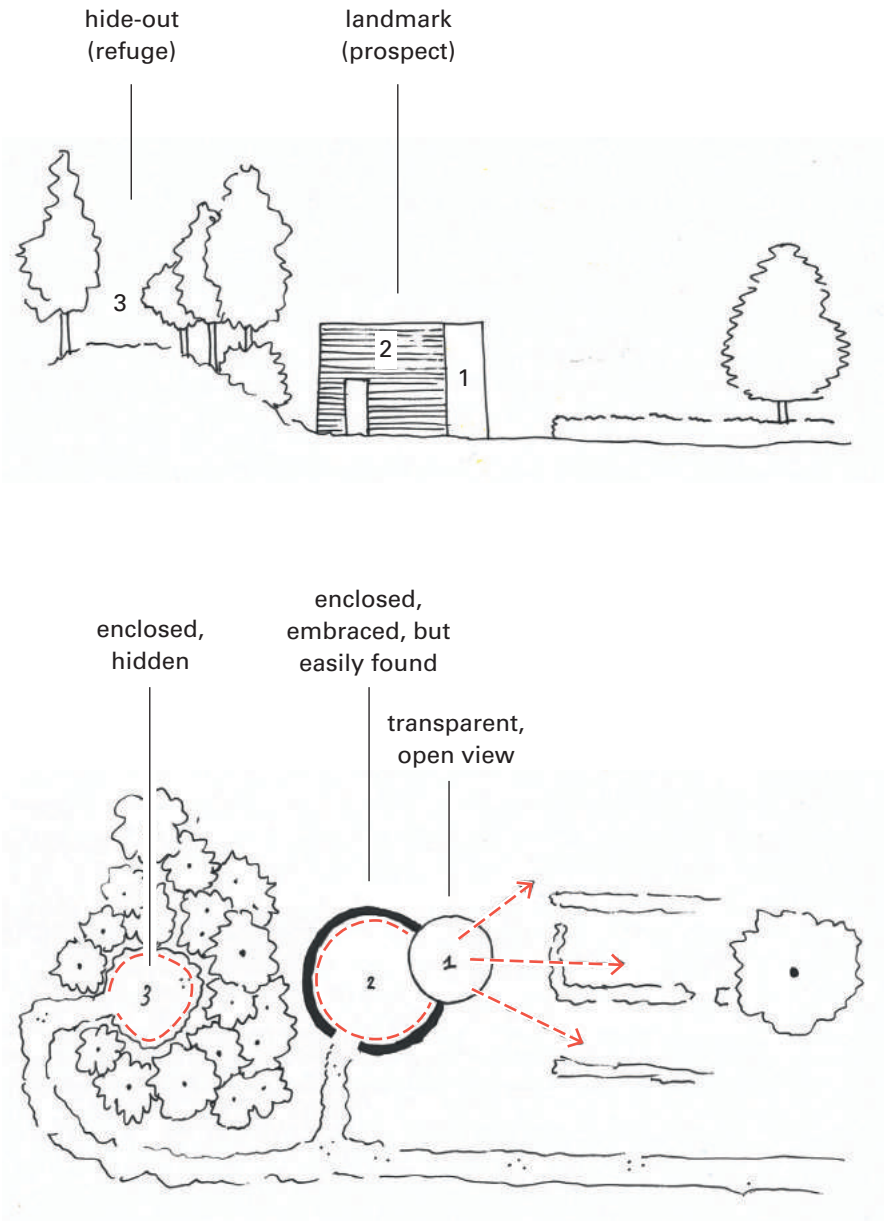


Fig. B38 – Scheme of section (top) and plan (bottom) of Graubner pavilion

Graubner pavilion

The contrast between the open (no. 1 in fig. B37) and closed (2) circular spaces of the pavilion is extended into the landscape. On the side of the glass room, the landscape is open and the vegetation low, allowing long views. On the other side, the landscape is densely vegetated with high trees. Located on a small hill is another circular space (3), hidden from the path, the third step in the sequence.

Fig. 39-40 – Exterior (top) and interior of the Labyrinth pavilion

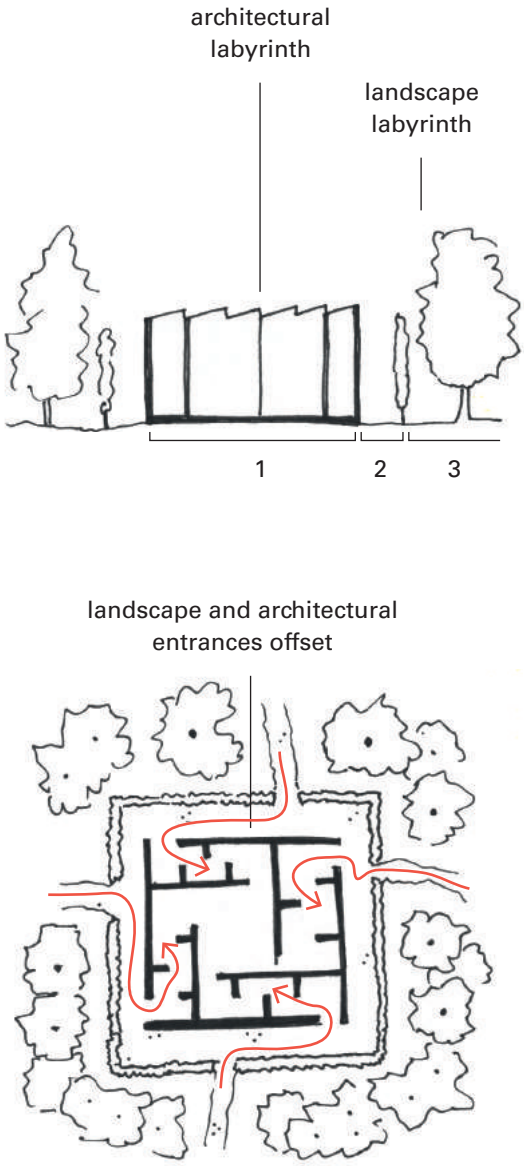


Fig. B41 – Scheme of section (top) and plan (bottom) of Labyrinth pavilion

Labyrinth pavilion

The maze of the pavilion is extended into the landscape by, firstly, another wall of beech hedges, and secondly, by an area of dense vegetation in an otherwise open river landscape. The entrances of the beech hedge and the pavilion are not directly opposite each other, enhancing the disorientating effect: the labyrinth is already initiated outside of the pavilion.

Fig. B40 – Look-out from the front square of the Schnecke pavilion and the fully closed facade of the pavilion.

Fig. B41 – The closed and hidden entrance of the pavilion

Fig. B42 – The interior court with reflective facades.

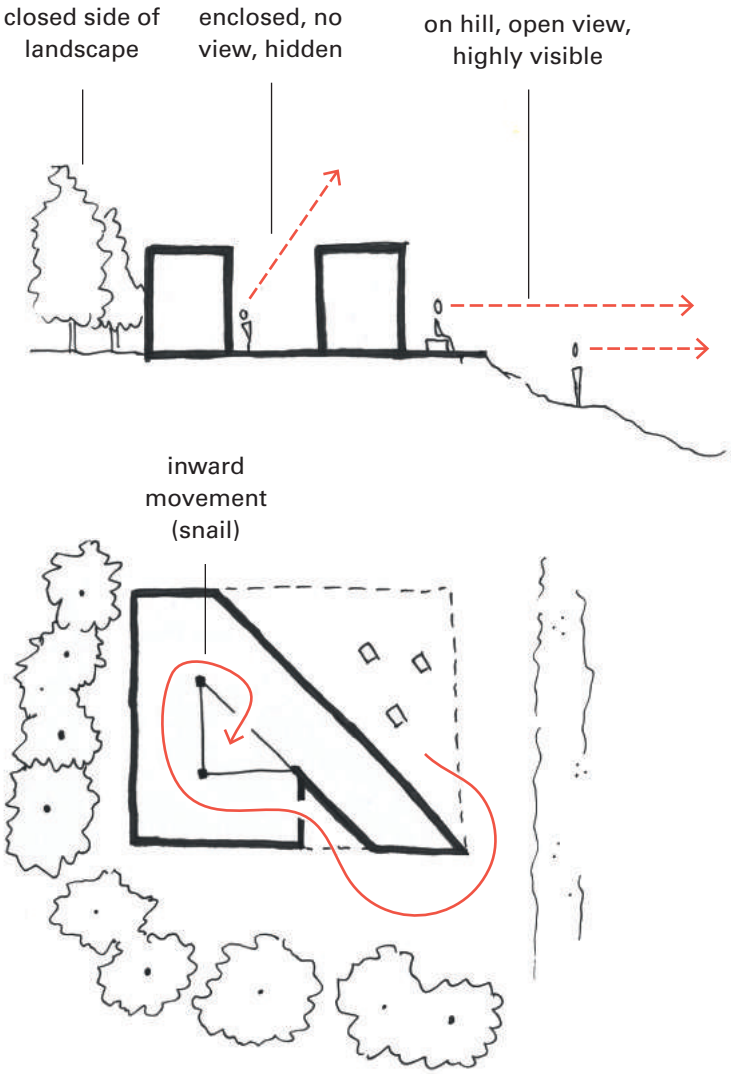


Fig. B43 – Scheme of section (top) and plan (bottom) of the Schnecke pavilion

Schnecke

The Schnecke (meaning ‘snail’) pavilion, an inward spiral that leads the visitor from one of the most open places of the park – a formal square overlooking the valley from its position on the hill – to the most internally oriented space – a small, triangular court at the heart of the pavilion, lined with reflective facades that block out the enveloping art room.

Fig. B44 – View of Turm from entrance steps (Weilacher, 2005)

Fig. B45 – View of the interior of Turm with view extending out over the path

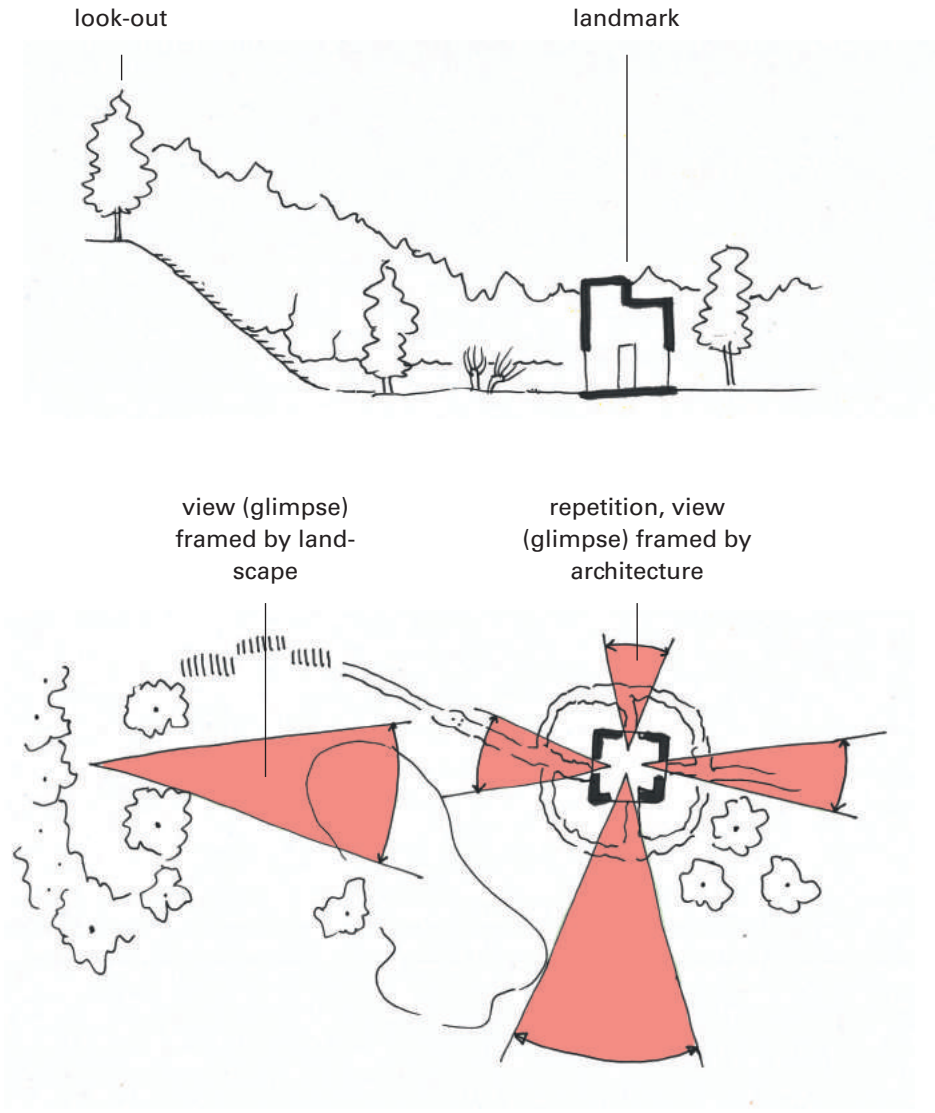


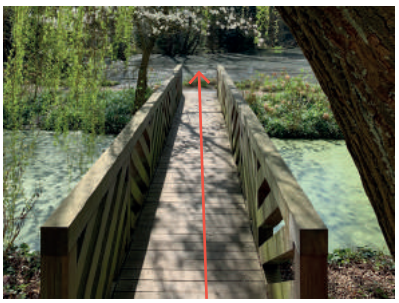
Fig. B46 – Scheme of section (top) and plan (bottom) of the Turm pavilion

Turm

Turm is the first pavilion one encounters after entering the park. The vertical frames of the landscape (fig. B45) mimic the vista on the top of the stairs (fig. B44). This ensemble of stairs and pavilion is both the beginning and the end of the route through the park. Whereas the route into the park provides the prospect of a day to be spend in a utopia-like valley, the way out is far more nostalgic. Instead of moving down, one has to climb up. Instead of looking out, one only sees hillside, and instead of looking forward, one can look back and reflect on the past day, taking in a familiar vista that may be different now that one has been in it.

1. Stairs

2. Ramp



3. Bridge

4. Bridge

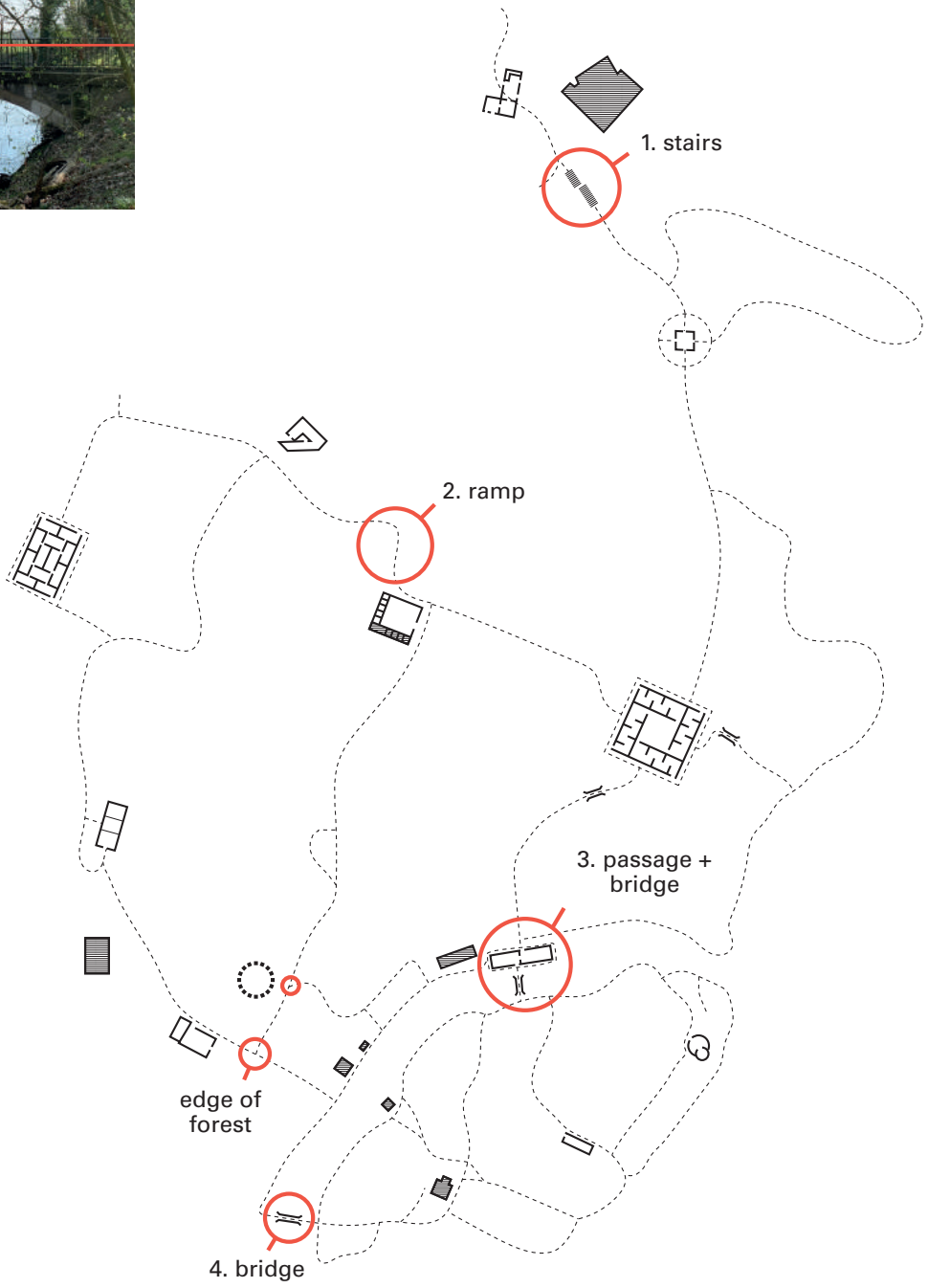


Fig. B47 – Passages between the different landscape regions

The visitor is guided through the park by paths and implicit guides such as architectural landmarks and art. There is no signage, and there are no information plagues near the art pieces. It is allowed (or at least, not indicated as forbidden) to walk on the grass, but visitors tend to stick to the paths, apart from some open fields on the hill where children play. On the paths, direction is free and there are several crossings and moments of choice. The transitions between the three distinguished landscapes are often clearly defined – by a bridge, a passage building, a staircase and a ramp. Although paths run around all pavilions, the routes predominantly go through the buildings, their architecture incorporated in the experience. It is impossible to get physically lost; the park is relatively small, has plenty of vantage points and almost all paths lead back to the Labyrinth, a point one recognises from the way in. It is, however, possible to lose oneself mentally, as little attention is required when it comes to way-finding. The general absence of explicit information, in combination with the implicit (landscape) architectural guidance through the park, sets the scene for a mentally undemanding, emotionally and sensory stimulating experience.

Interestingly, the freedom of movement may result in some very different experiences. Everybody (except for visitors with disabilities) enter at the same place, the staircase followed by the Turm, and the Labyrinth. They are, of course, free to either enter or pass the pavilions, and then to turn right, towards the restaurant and landscape C on the hill or towards landscape A, the park, a much more intimate and inward setting. It is likely that walking through the garden first and then continuing into the park may stimulate a different experience than starting in the park.

Art

The lack of information provided on the art also encourages a more independent inner contemplation undisturbed by other political and societal connotations and expectations. Most art indeed seems to invite a mostly aesthetic and subjective (personal) consideration: there is no distinction between nature outside and art inside – neither requires explanation, nor asks for judgement (Hans-Willi Notthoff, in interview ‘De stilte van Hombroich’, 1998).

Fig. B48 – Eating outside in front of the cafeteria

Fig. B49 – visitors awaiting their turn to step into the glass room of the Graubner pavilion

Fig. B50 – Children playing outside on the open fields in front of the Schnecke pavilion

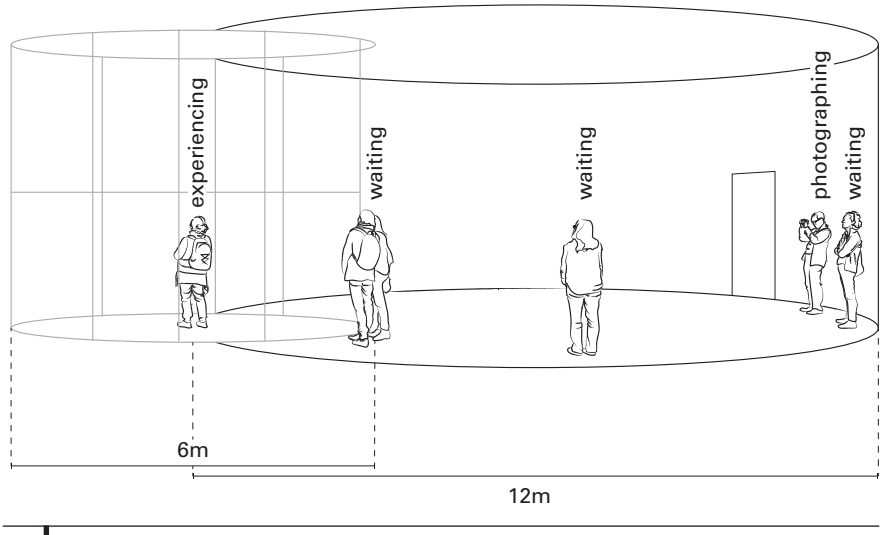


Fig. B51 – Scheme of interior of Graubner Pavilion. While I am observing, only one person or couple is in the glass room at a time. The other visitors wait for their turn in the bigger 'anteroom'.

It is interesting to observe how the three different landscape settings influence the behaviour of the visitors. In the meadow and garden, people noticeably behave differently than in the secluded park, where they talk softly, sit quietly or retreat to one of the hidden seating areas. Out in the open fields, children play and conversations are louder. Within the pavilions, it is eerily quiet, the loud echo forcing people to make as little noise as possible as not to disturb others. In some pavilions, people sing, individually or collectively. In the smaller pavilions, the atmosphere is charged and convivial at the same time. An example is the Graubner pavilion. The glass circular space is smaller, 6m in width, than the brick one, acting as a prospect, but also as an aquarium. During the time I stood in the pavilion, only one individual was in the glass room at all times, the other visitors waiting for their turn in the bigger room and watching the person behind the glass. The conviviality continues in the landscape which, like art might, seems to invite conversation ranging from short comments to joined admiration.

Activation of the senses

As mentioned, the landscape and architecture play on more than just the visual sense. Airplanes and cars on the motorway puncture the invisible bubble, joining in with the geese, birds, insects, frogs, people singing and water trickling (Kastner, 1996, 53). Taste, too, is included in the overall experience. Since the opening of the park, visitors are served nourishing dark bread, boiled potatoes, butter, *reuzel* (lard) and jam.

Fig. B52 – View of Orangerie pavilion from the other side of the lake

Different world

Several elements of Museum Insel Hombroich set the scene for a landscape of serenity and contemplation. Firstly, it is very emphatically defined as a separate, internalised world. The passage of the entrance pavilion near the car park and the descend down into the valley allow the visitor to consciously leave behind the usual and known and enter the new and different. Throughout the park, this sensation of separation and enclosure is sustained by the shields of trees, dense vegetation and slopes. Like the high-voltage pylons and the belching Amercentrale chimneys in the Biesbosch, one is continuously reminded of the "real world" by the passing cars and airplanes, but is also encouraged to place oneself outside of those daily spaces and rhythms (Restany, 1987, 13).

Different landscapes, different atmospheres

Secondly, it is interesting to consider how, within the park, three clearly distinguished but interconnected landscapes vary in openness, diversity of vegetation and differences in height, and accordingly generate different atmospheres and invite different modes of interaction. The park on the island is the most densely and variously vegetated landscape with limited view ranges, providing shelter and invoking curiosity and mystery. The meadow is more open in itself, but also most obviously an enclosed valley, surrounded by slopes, the river and vegetation. This section of the park is the most (seemingly) natural and located on the way in and the way out of the park, encouraging movement over the paths. The garden on top of the hill, invites a yet again different approach and is open in its lay-out, inviting more outgoing behaviour and free movement. Overall, the buzz is centred at the meeting of these three landscapes, at the restaurant where people join and have a break. Through this variety, the park does not only lend itself to differing moods and motives, but also embodies a sequence of landscapes on a relatively small scale that continue to be interesting throughout the day.

Sublime and beautiful

The landscape lay-out of Insel Hombroich shows similarities with the patterns of a restorative natural environment from the Kaplans. Orientation is enhanced by landmarks, guiding paths and the subdivision into different regions, with clearly defined passages in between. The compositions of slopes, water features and trees are carefully choreographed in an orderly and legible way, but the landscapes are also complex and highly varied and thus allow for a sense of mystery and exploration. Like Claude Lorrain paintings, pavilions are half-hidden in the landscape or stand as landmarks at the end of paths. However, this landscape is not a picturesque painting that should be admired from afar, but invites physical and sensory interaction through its visual variety, acoustic playfulness, and atmospheric intensity. The comprehensibility of the small scale, the naturalness of the landscape, the winding paths, the versatility of fauna and the slow rhythm of one's visit set the scene for a soothing, laid-back experience.

In Hombroich, the beautiful and the sublime manifest themselves most strongly in the synthesis of and interaction between architecture and landscape. Whereas they contrast strongly in materiality and form (simplistic and plain vs. feral and lush), they blur together in sensory and atmospheric experience and narrative. The relative emptiness and starkness of the pavilions, their audible approach, their relation to and position in the landscape, the route that precedes and follows the interior experience and the symbolism of these spaces come together and create a mood that can be both intense and soothing (depending on the beholder). To some, these settings invoke overwhelming moments of high awareness and sensitivity, luring one into the presence, away from everyday rhythms. To others, their serenity and simplicity have a calming effect. In this way, the architecture and landscapes position themselves as a backdrop not only for art and nature, but also for thought and introspection.

The sequential combination of the park's many atmospheres is as important as the individual moments provided in and around the pavilions. Moments of high emotional intensity – mostly in or near the pavilions – are interspersed with moments of relief – predominantly in the more natural parts of the landscape. As such, usurpation and relaxation, the sublime and the beautiful, supersede each other in a pleasant, orchestrated rhythm.

Fig. B53 – The surrounding hills, with high grass, different bushes and trees, the opposite of the concrete courtyard (all images on this page come from the private collection of SteenhuisMeurs)

Fig. B54 – Concrete courtyard, with rectangular mirror pools and the occasional pine tree.

Fig. B55 – West wing with double floor and large glass surfaces, open view over surrounding hills

Fig. B56 – East wings, hovering close to the ground, with lower windows and limited views over the hills.

Fig. B57 – Limited connection with interiors from courtyard through canopy...

Fig. B58 – ... and small rectangular windows.

Contextuality

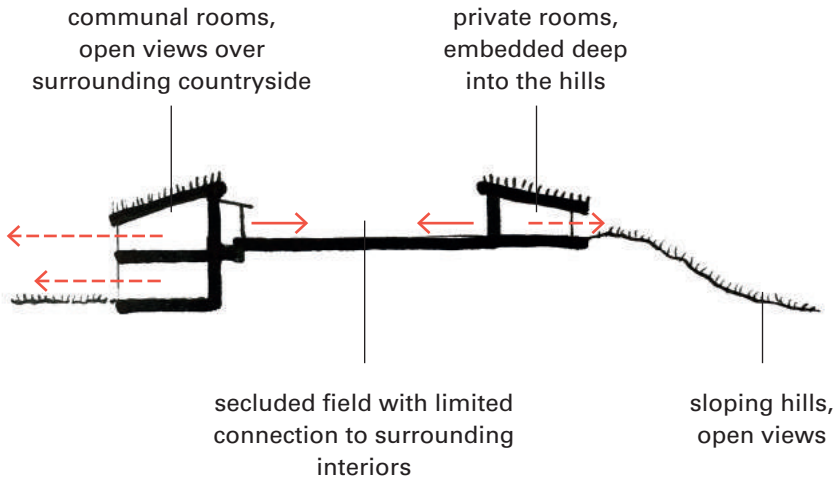


Fig. B59 – scheme of section of the Entrepenørskolen in Ebeltoft

The synthesis of landscape and architecture at Hombroich – the way the pavilions are embedded in the landscape and the landscape responds to the orientation and design of the pavilion – creates, as we have seen, an intensified experience. Landscape and architecture together set the scene, they respond to each other and melt together. Relating to this enquiry's focus on the intersection of architecture, landscape architecture and the natural setting, I want to take this intermezzo to further explore this contextuality. By 'contextuality', I do not only refer to the definition of 'contextual architecture' – an architecture that responds to its surroundings by respecting what is already there – but to an architecture and landscape that respond to each other and set the scene for a more intense and encompassing experience.

Entrepenørskolen, Ebeltoft, Denmark

An interesting example is the Entrepenørskolen in Ebeltoft in Denmark, built in 1967-1968 and designed by Friis & Moltke. The school is embedded in the hilly landscape east of Ebeltoft. Orthogonal wings are organised around a courtyard with large concrete tiles, a couple of pine trees, and shallow mirror pools with rectangular concrete stepping stones. The grey colour and hard materials of this courtyard are in stark contrast with the wild landscape surrounding it, presenting two opposite versions of nature and intensifying the characteristics of both (fig. B53 and 54).

Seen from the hills, the wings surrounding the courtyard are nestled in the landscape, low to the ground and with grass roofs. Through its typology of a courtyard building, each room is connected visually with the surroundings. The west wing, with classrooms on the ground floor and reception and living rooms on the first floor, has large windows overlooking the fields (fig. B55), while the private bedrooms in the east and south wings are embedded lower into the landscape and have smaller horizontally oriented windows (fig. B56). In contrast, connections to the inner courtyard are much more limited. The west and north wings (with municipal functions) are lower than the courtyard and are rimmed by a wooden overhang that hovers about 1.5 meter over the main level of the courtyard (fig. B57). The east and south wings have small rectangular windows, rimmed with broad white borders (fig. B58). By embedding the building in the landscape, matching the visual connection between interior and exterior to the function of each room and by presenting an opposite version of the surrounding nature, this building is strongly rooted in its landscape, resulting in a sense of belonging and embedding.

Fig. B60 – From the starting point (on the defender's side), the fort looks surprisingly horizontal, slowly sloping upwards.

Fig. B61 – A relatively low stairs invites the visitor to move upwards.

Fig. B62 –The visitor reaches the top of the fort, where he can take a break on the benches or continue onwards over the same line.

Fig. B63 – Reaching the other end of the fort, the visitor suddenly realises how much he has climbed.

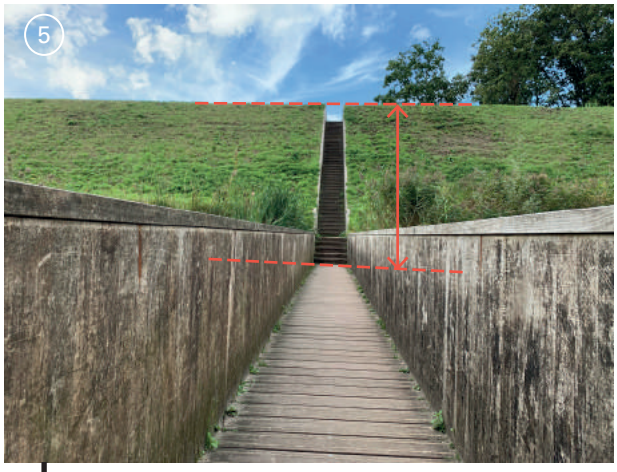


Fig. B64 – Going down the steps and 'into' the water, looking back, the visitor's eye meets a high, once impenetrable wall.

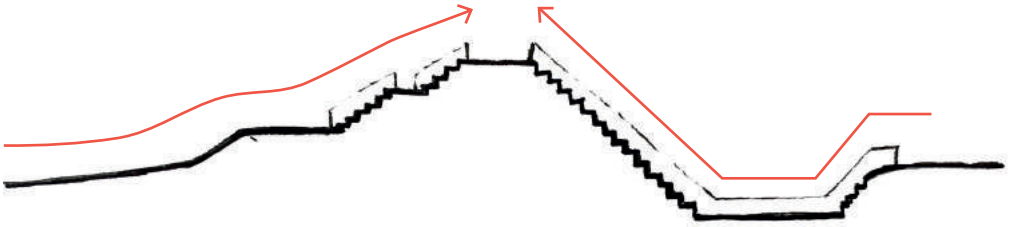


Fig. B65 – scheme of section of the path through Fort de Roovere, ending in the so-called Moses Bridge on the right.

Fort de Roovere, Halsteren, The Netherlands
In 1628, the Staten of Zeeland and Holland built a series of forts at the western side of Noord-Brabant, a province in the South of the Netherlands. Together with existing fortified cities, these forts, interconnected by dike bodies, allowed the people east of this Waterlinie to inundate (intentionally flood) the plains around these forts and block the enemy from their land. Today, several of these forts have been rebuild as a memory and example of this typically Dutch defence system. Architectural office RO&AD designed several 'moments' or interventions within this landscape that intensify their experience or marks places of interest. At Fort de Roovere near the village of Halsteren, the architects cut a straight line of paths, steps and bridges through the fort. Walking this line, one gets a strong sense of the height differences of the fort and experiences what people at the time would have experienced when attacking or defending this fort. Starting from the defender's side, the visitor cross a small bridge and gradually move upwards among the ditches and slopes. When he finds himself at the highest point and looks down, he suddenly realises how high he has climbed. Before him is a steep and long stairs ending in a bridge that does not hover over the water but crosses through it. Going down the steps and crossing this Moses bridge, you are suddenly very low to the ground, with your head just popping over the water line. Looking back now, your vision is blocked by a high rampart slope. By introducing a simple line (a line that was never there) that cuts through the landscape, the architects have brought back some of the experience of this fort, re-introducing moments of refuge, prospects, power, pitfalls and vulnerability, strongly linked to the site's historical narrative.

Fig. B66 – View over the lake, already framed by existing trees, is framed again by feature window.

Fig. B67 – View of the sea from the sculpture garden. Third wing of the museum is embedded underground to maintain this view.

Fig. B68 – Wings of the museum wrap around existing features, such as the ancient tree on the left.

Fig. B69 – Secluded place at the bottom of the hill, near the sea, is made into a moment by including a platform fitted in between the trees and bushes.

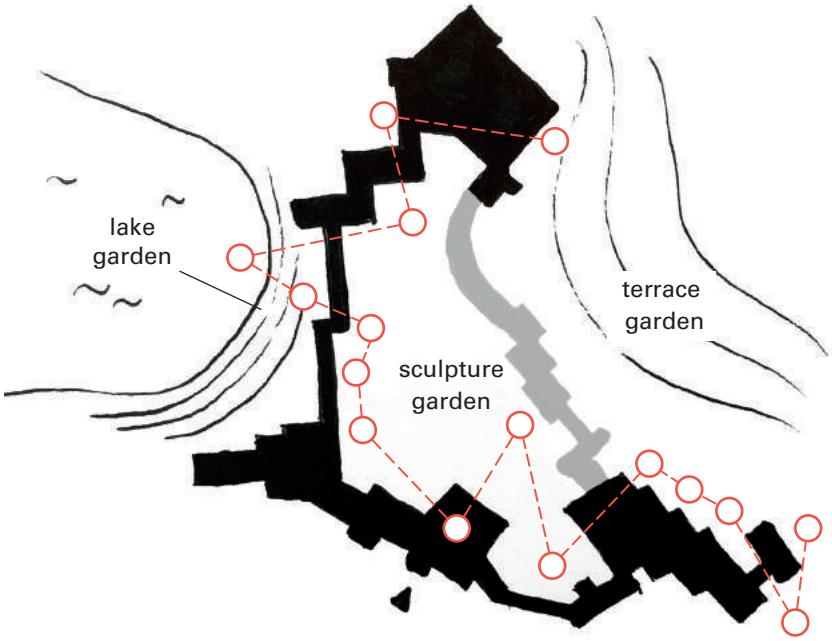


Fig. B70 – Three wings of Louisiana Museum wind between important features and vistas of the existing landscape, enveloping the surroundings and becoming one with the landscape (based on Sheridan, 2018)

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark

In c. 1810 a lake was dug as a pirate harbour in the war against England. The soil was used for a hill that blocked the view of the harbour from the sea. About fifty years later, royal gamekeeper Alexander Brun build his villa here. Another hundred years later, businessman Knud W. Jensen founded his museum. His aim was to connect art to nature, and thus create an unpretentious, neutral background ('the cleanse effect'). We find a similar motive in Hombroich. The museum was designed by Vilhelm Wohlert and Jørgen Bo and developed over the course of thirty years. The result is a museum consisting of three wings, dividing the landscape into three sections with different characteristics (this reminds us again of Hombroich).

The lake garden is most secluded, shielded by a steep hill and dense vegetation, with narrow paths winding through. The sculpture garden lies on the hill, with exotic trees and flowers and a framed view over the sea. The terrace garden is a theatre-shaped grassy slope with a panorama view of the sea that lies right on the other side of a low wall at the bottom of the garden. The museum wings are carefully embedded in the existing landscape, winding through and in between feature points, such as old trees, special vistas and existing structures. Designing with landscape features as main guides, and positioning each room and each feature in relation to its surroundings and the landscape's morphology, landscape and architecture are joined in a strong symbioses (Sheridan, 2018).

Fig. B71 – Framing windows and parquet flooring marking the direction of the view (Haus Lange)

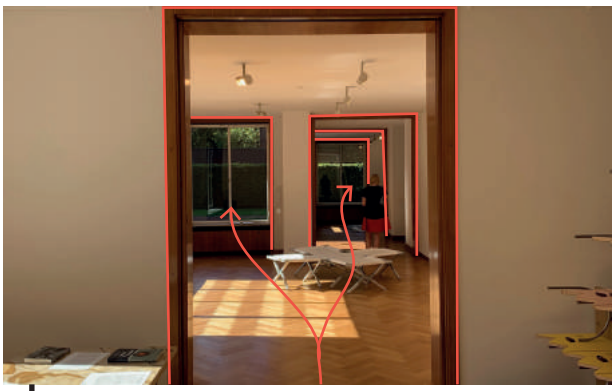


Fig. B72 – Interior and exterior space flowing into each other (Haus Esters)

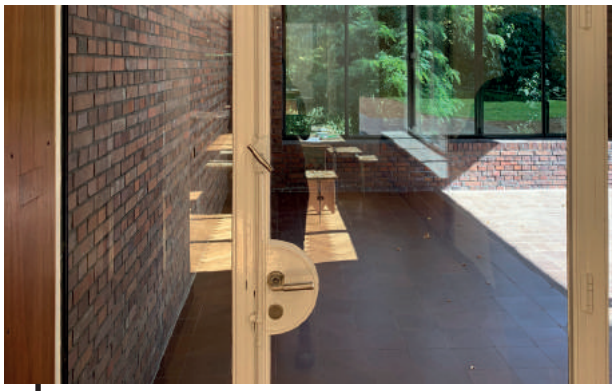


Fig. B73 – Entry to outdoor room through glass door (Haus Esters)

Fig. B74 – Out door room with window framing garden on the east (Haus Esters)

Fig. B75 – Framed view from the outdoor room (Haus Esters)

Fig. B76 – Outdoor room extending into garden through overhanging roof (Haus Esters)

Fig. B77 – Rectangular outdoor room, framed with hedges (Hause Lange)

Fig. B78 – View onto Haus Esters from garden, lined with old trees and plant beds.

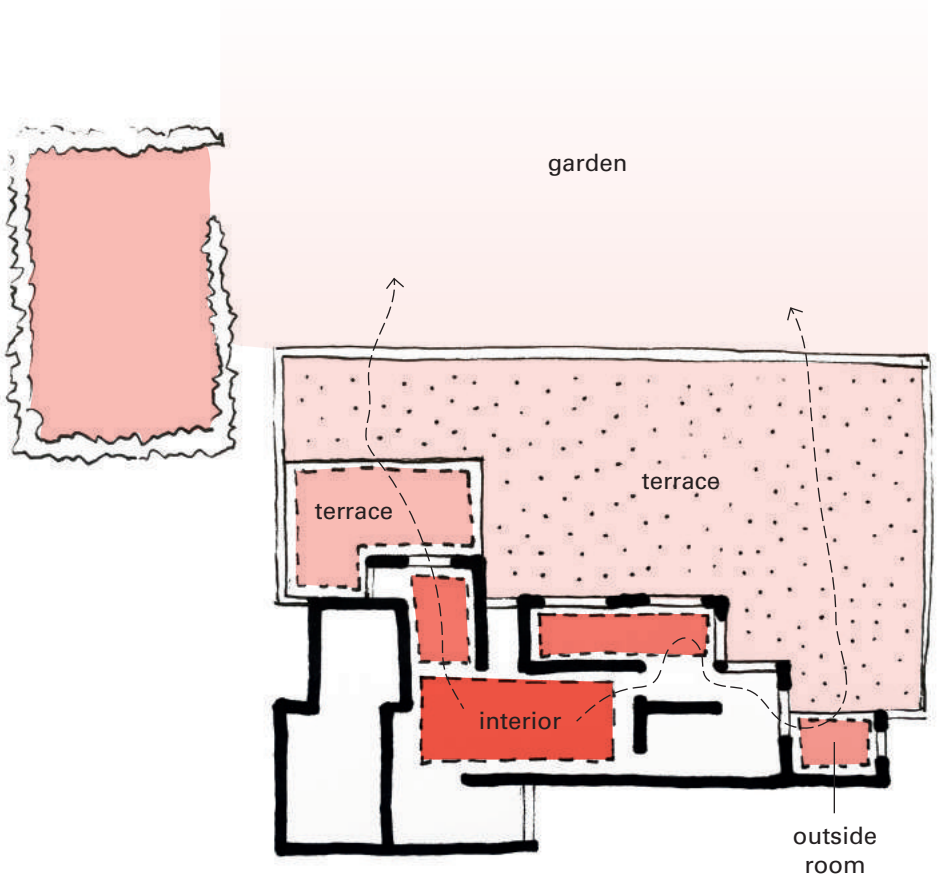


Fig. B79 – The flow between interior and exterior at Haus Lange (plan view)

Haus Lange and Haus Esters, Krefeld, Germany
At the end of the 1920s, two silk manufacturers Dr. Josef Esters en Hermann Lange assigned architect Mies van der Rohe to design two separate but corresponding villas on neighbouring plots in Krefeld, Germany. It is not entirely clear to what extent he influenced the garden design, but interior and exterior do form an interesting ensemble. The suburban villas in Krefeld have little wild surroundings to respond to, but yet there is a strong sense of spatial flow in the transition between inside and outside, between the domesticated and the free. This sequence starts in the heart of the home, in rooms that are surrounded by other rooms and with the occasional view of the front or back garden. From here, one moves into garden rooms with panorama windows that capture the exterior as a landscape painting. At Haus Lange, the herringbone parquet even points to those views, giving the spaces a strong sense of direction. From these garden rooms, one can step out into a semi-room, with three walls – one of which with a window – and a ceiling, and at the place where the fourth wall would have been an open connection with the garden. From this outside room, one can step out onto the terrace, a straight-lined plateau, minimalistically laid to lawn, bordered by a low brick wall. At Haus Lange, there is a second outdoor-room next to this plateau, this time made of hedges. Then follows a wide lawn, bordered by fringes of trees and plants shielding a winding path that runs through it. This choreographed transition merges the interior and exterior into a gradient of inside- and outsideness, a rhythm of enclosure and exposure that responds to the preferences and moods of its users.

Fig. B80 – Courtyard accessible from ground floor of the museum, close to the street and city sounds, but visually enclosed.

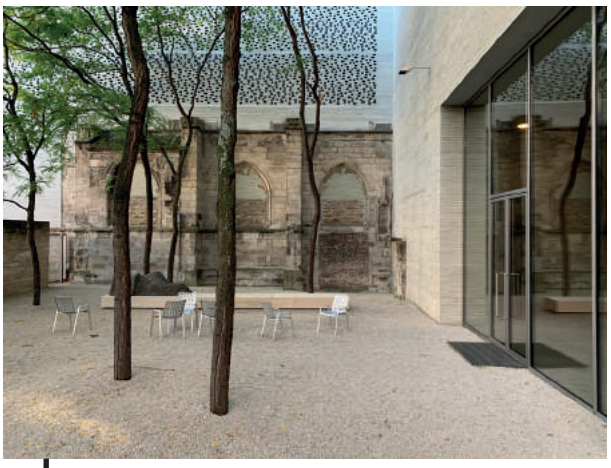


Fig. B81 – Courtyard accessible from ground floor of the museum, shielded on two sides by a wall that ends just above eye level.

Fig. B82 – Museum space turned inwards, no connection to outside.

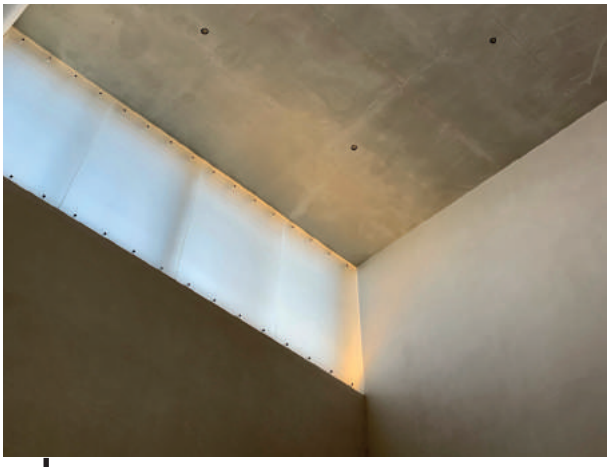


Fig. B83 – Interior spreading out over two levels, daylight coming in from above but no visual connection to outside

Fig. B84 – View on cathedral from top floor.

Fig. B85 – View over surroundings streets from a room clad in warm wood.

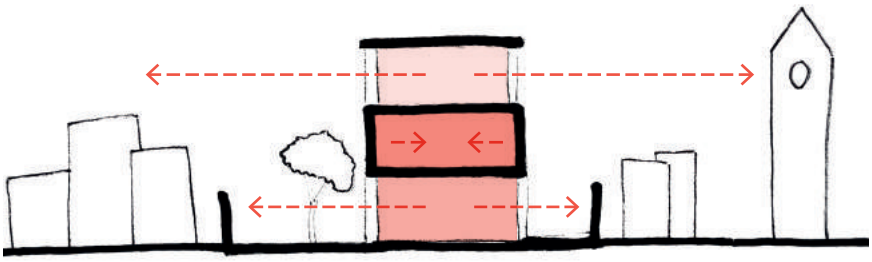


Fig. B86 – Schematic section of Kolumba Museum with the different ways of relating to the museum's surroundings

Kolumba Museum, Cologne, Germany

In the middle of Cologne's city centre, this modern art museum has little natural or garden surroundings to relate to. In fact, the architect Peter Zumthor responded to the urban environment by creating a sanctuary-like interior that only opens to the surroundings on the top floor, looking out over the roofs of Cologne. The three floors of the museum each have a different relation with the exterior. From the ground floor, one can enter various courtyards that are shielded from the streets by walls that are just higher than eye level (fig. B80 and 81). The first floor has very little windows, creating an internalised atmosphere, a shelter-like experience that blocks out all that is outside of the building and allows one to turn inwards (fig. B82 and 83). The second floor, lastly, has large rectangular windows that frame special features in the surrounding city, reducing them to carefully composed picture-like stills (fig. B84 and 85).

Fig. B87 – The cloister around the entrance courtyard

CASE STUDY 2

Abbey Roosenberg

Location	Waasmunster, Belgium
Construction	1972-1975
Architect	Dom Hans van der Laan
Function	Abbey for Victorin and Fransiscan nuns

He may seem somewhat conceited and unwilling to compromise, says warden Philippe Thyssen towards the end of our tour of Abbey Roosenberg. But according to the nuns, Dom Hans van der Laan was the most amiable man. Kind-hearted. Gentle. But his system had to be right.

When assessing their environment, Thyssen continues, people automatically start counting. We compare, we apply logic and we judge. In nature, one cannot count – for everything is endless – nor compare – for nothing is the same. In nature, we don't judge. We feel calm. Van der Laan aspired to create a similar effect in architecture with *eenvoud,* simplicity. Every dimension comes forth from a mathematical system. Every slat, every tile and every brick are of the same size. Shapes are repeated. All of this to quiet the mind.

Studying the ideas and architecture of Van der Laan may not seem as the most logical choice in relation to what has been said before in this research. Firstly, Van der Laan regarded man and nature as absolute extremitites, with architecture as mediator that responds to both sides of the spectrum. Secondly, he was very strict and systematic in his approach, distilling sensory and empirical notions to numbers and ratios. However, the ideas behind his work and the task he set for himself very much correspond to the sought-after program and approach in the Biesbosch design assignment. Van der Laan cleverly distilled elements of nature and translated them into architecture, searching for ways in which architecture can, together with nature, enhance a contemplative and restful experience.

Fig. B88 – View of the east wing and chapel of Abbey Roosenberg (Alessandra Chemollo, in: Ferlenga & Verde, 2001)

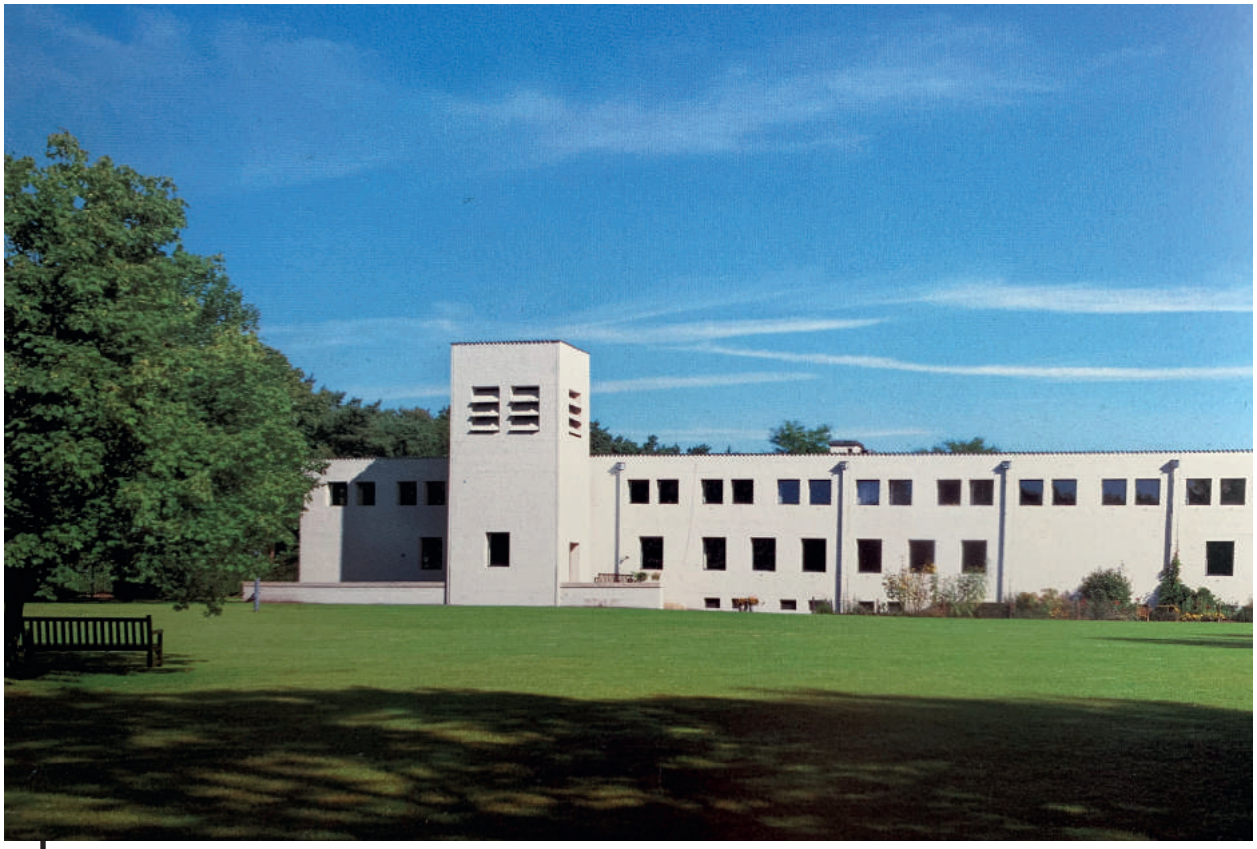


Fig. B89 – View of the south wing and clock tower of Abbey Roosenberg (Alessandra Chemollo, in: Ferlenga & Verde, 2001)

'The ground being too hard for our bare feet we make ourselves sandals of softer material than the ground, but tougher than our feet. [...] They bring about a harmony between our tender feet and the rough of the ground. With the house it is a matter not just of our feet and the ground, but of the meeting of our whole being with the total natural environment.' (Dom Hans van der Laan in 'Architectonic Space I.1, translation: Ferlenga &Verde, 2001, 162)

While Hans van der Laan (1904-1991) was spending several years in a sanatorium as a tuberculosis patient – close to fresh air near the woods – he became fascinated by nature and its divinity. Coming from an architecture family, he enrolled at the faculty in Delft, but quit after three years to join the abbey of St. Paulus in Oosterhout and became a monk. His fascination with architecture and its role of housing humans in nature continued nonetheless (Ferlenga & Verde, 199). When, after World War II, it was established that architects had to follow an extra course in order to rebuild or repair churches, Dom van der Laan and his brother Nico founded a course in church architecture in 's-Hertogenbosch. From this flowed the so-called Bossche School, a traditionalist movement based on the ideas and systems of Van der Laan. He published several books and essays, among which *Le Nombre Plastique* (1960), *De Architectonische Ruimte* (1977) and *Het Vormenspel der Liturgie* (1985). In his life, Van der Laan developed a range of architectural-mathematical systems and rules that he applied meticulously to the few, mostly spiritual buildings he designed. Many books and projects have been devoted to, most prominently, the Plastic Ratio.[1] It is, in the context of this project, not necessary to delve into the exact workings of these systems, but we will focus on their underlying meaning and the resulting experience.

Philosophy

To Van der Laan, the house (as the basic architectural function) 'is an addition to nature by which natural space is completed and made habitable for us' (Architectonic Space I.1, translation in Ferlenga & Verde, 2001, 162). As a reconciliation of man and nature, it should work as a sandal. He considered man and nature as 'two extreme terms' and regarded the house as a completion of the 'Great Architect's' creation of nature (Architectonic Space I.1).

1 Interesting studies are, among others, provided by Caroline Voet, in *Dom Hans van der Laan. A House for the Mind* (2017), D*om Hans van der Laan. Tomelilla* (2016) and several essays, and by Michel Remery in *Katholieke architectuur in de twintigste eeuw. De vier architecten van de Leidse familie Van der Laan* (2018) and *Mystery and Matter, On the relationship between liturgy and architecture in the thought of Dom Hans van der Laan* (2010).

Fig. B90 – Abbey Roosenberg, hidden in the woods (Google Maps)

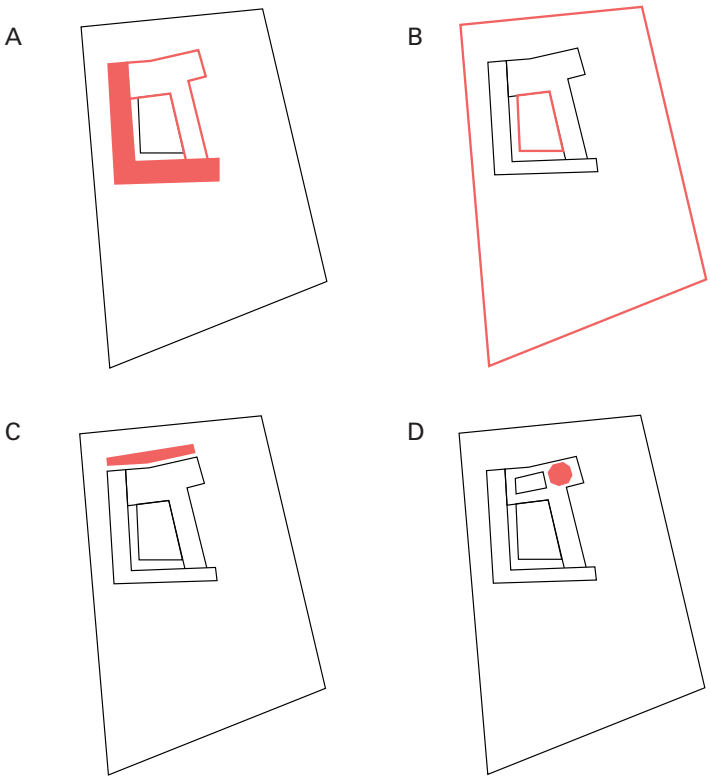


Fig. B91 – Schemes of the organisation of Abbey Roosenberg

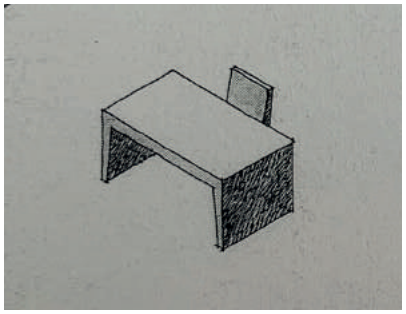
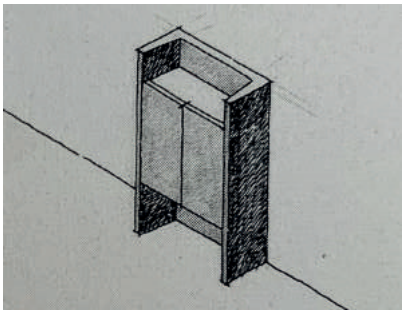
Van der Laan was commissioned in 1972 to design an abbey in Waasmunster, based on a published interview about his extension of the St. Benedictusberg Abbey in Vaals, the Netherlands. The Roosenberg abbey was to house Victorin and Franciscan nuns, which meant that it had to be house both internalised and hospitable lifestyles. Van der Laan designed two L-shaped wings, one of which slightly rotated so that the inner courtyard had the exact same shape as the site (Scheme A and B in fig. B91). Similarly, the courtyard mimicked the site's location in the woods as an enclosed sanctuary.

The slight inclination of one of the wings also creates a slightly concave entrance facade, luring the visitor in (C). The lowest of the two volumes housed the main entrance, the atelier, a study room and small reception rooms and was interrupted by an octagonal church on its corner (D). The second volume housed, on the ground floor, a small museum room, a conference room, a refectory for guests and one for nuns, the kitchen and the living room for the nuns. The guestrooms were housed on the second floor in the west wing, the nuns' bedrooms in the South wing.

Simplicity

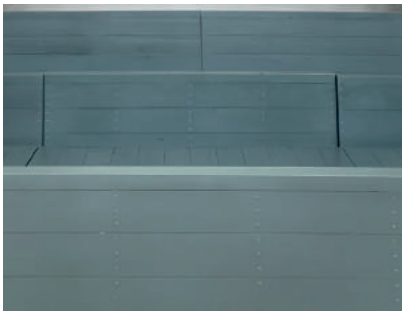


Repetition


Subdued palette





Light as guide



Fig. B92 – A selection from Van der Laan's tool kit of shades, materials and methods.

During his time in the TB-clinic, Van der Laan found his God in nature. Nature and its elements (woods, trees, bushes, valleys, streams) are innumerous, always flowing and never the same (Remery, 2010, 32). This infinite variety comforts human-beings, for it is useless to try and make sense of it – in this, we can recognise Martin Drenthen's view of nature as a disinterested entity (see essay 1). Van der Laan paralleled this to architecture. Here – limited by human capacity – a similar spatial and temporal boundlessness is impossible. But we may strive for its effect with simplicity and repetition:

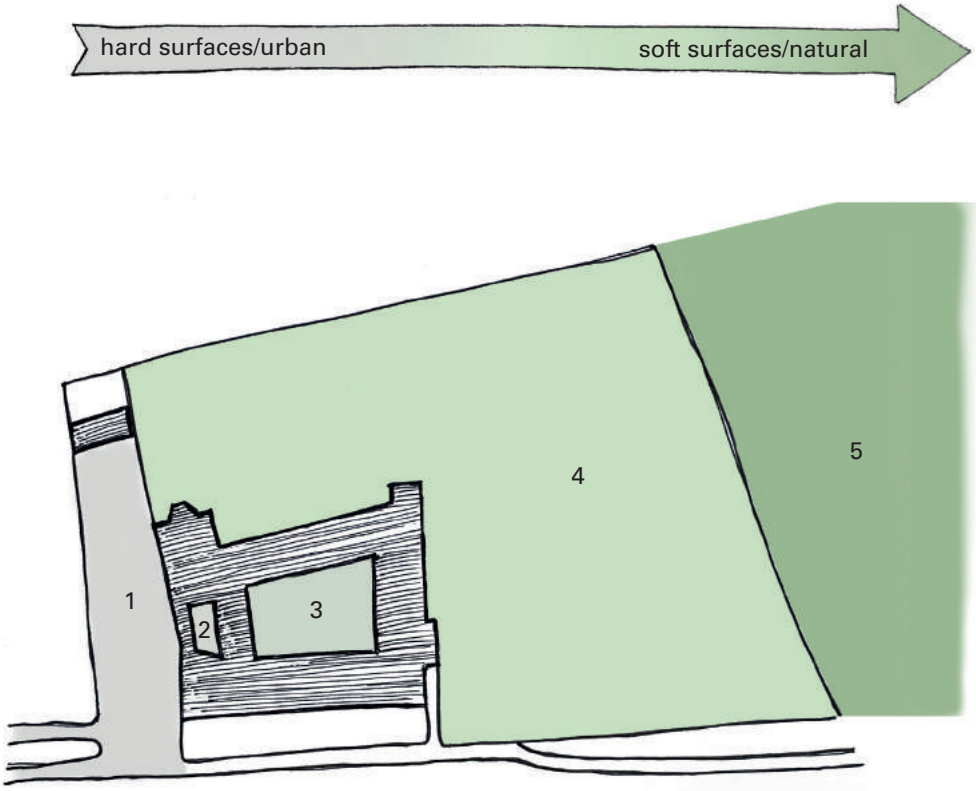
> 'In de natuur is alles met een onnaspeurlijke variatie en veelheid en toch met een grote eenheid en harmonie. 't Is Gods glorie als wij dat op onze manier binnen de beperkingen van ons menselijk verstand nadoen. Hoe eenvoudiger wij dat doen, hoe beter wij die zelfde eenheid en harmonie kunnen bereiken.' (Van der Laan, 1975, 32)

For one, Abbey Roosenberg lacks floor plinths, window sills and in many places doors and curtains. It is very sparsely furnished with simple benches, tables and cupboards. Additionally, a remarkably small range of materials, shapes and dimensions are repeated constantly; the trapezium-shaped void of the stools comes back in the church's altar and the footprint of the closets. Every ceiling and non-retaining wall are clad in the same pale-coloured planks of wood, all of the same size. The load-bearing walls are always 50 cm thick and the stone floor slabs 50 cm wide, functioning as the base measurement unit for all dimensions: the interior-cloister around the courtyard is seven times as wide (3.5m), just as the vestibules that connect every living space, the sleeping quarters upstairs and the paths in the garden. Van der Laan considered this doubling of the average human height (which he took at 1.75m) as the measurements of a space where humans would feel most comfortable. The front square was again seven times as wide (25m), which was 1/7th of the total depth of the site (175m) (Van der Laan, 1975, 44). With this set of strict repetitions, Van der Laan strived to create a self-evident, logical simplicity and serenity (*vanzelfsprekende eenvoud*) that neared that of nature, and thus ban outer distraction to allow for internal contemplation (Van der Laan, 1975, 6).

Colors and materials

Van der Laan applied only a small variety of materials. The load-bearing walls are built with fired brickwork, coated with cement and then whitewashed. Cement is fragile and when scoured immediately chafes off, prompting nuns and visitors to treat it carefully, like they may treat a tree's soft bark. Most floors are laid with ochre Indian stone cut into squares of 50 to 50cm. The ceilings and non-retaining walls are clad with planks of wood painted in pale, grey-toned colours. The window frames are iron. The roofs are flat and laid with gravel, but on the rims terracotta bent tiles painted black cover the walls. Inside, elements such as stairs and lintels are concrete, poured in-situ (Ferlenga & Verde, 2001, 96).

Usually, Van der Laan was insistent on applying solely shades of grey in his buildings, but in this case, the nuns preferred to introduce some colour. The compromise becomes apparent in the grey-blue tones of the doors and ceilings, the greenish colour of the benches and chairs, the maroon of the tables and the blue pillows in the living room.



1.

Asphalt slab

2.

Brick and clinker; columns mimick trees

3.

Formal garden

4.

Managed natural garden

5.

Woods

Fig. B93 – Phased transition from formal to more natural landscape

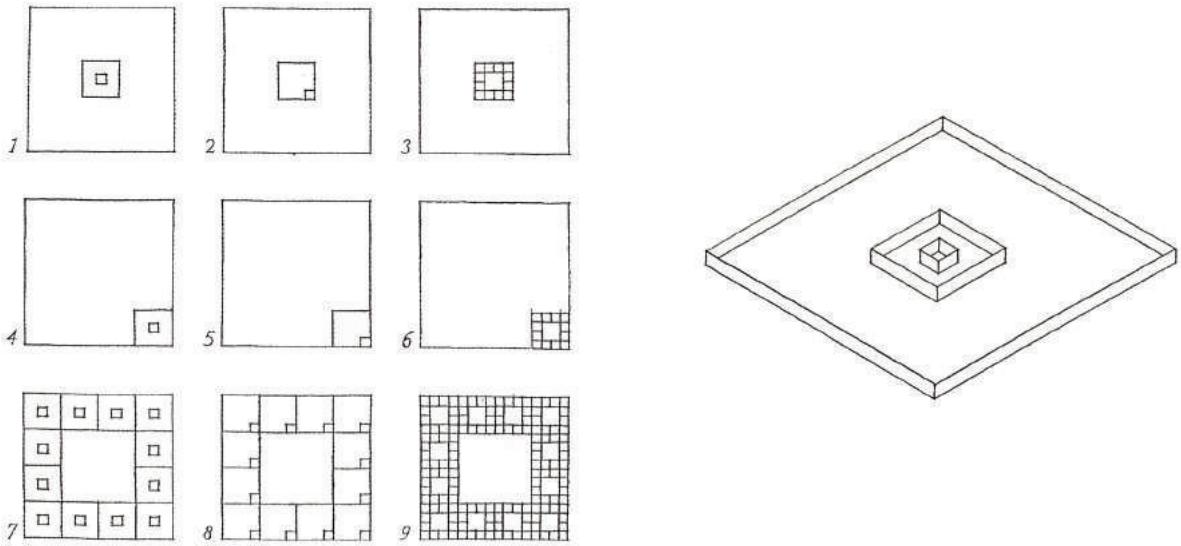
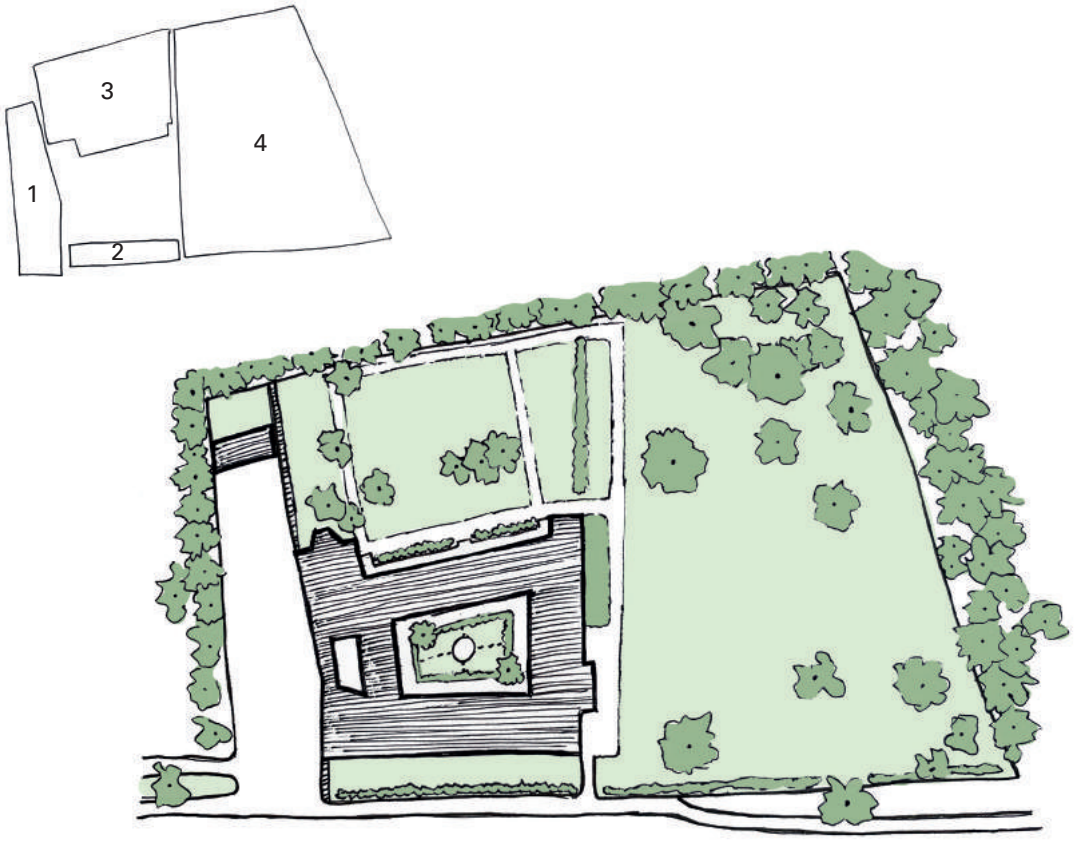


Fig. B94 – Sketch by Van der Laan of possible compositions of the cell, the court and the domain (Ten Arve, 2008, 8)

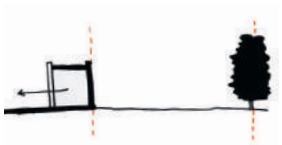
An important aspect of the Abbey's architecture and landscape is the system of phased transitions that Van der Laan applied to various aspects of the complex. In his many theoretical treatises, Van der Laan refrains from a dualist view and thinks in multiple phases, often discerning at least three degrees. He distinguishes, for example, work-space, walking space and visual field, translating architecturally in the sequence of the cell, the court and the domain (Remery, 2010, 207) (see fig. B94).

Culture-nature I

Van der Laan embeds the abbey in its wooded surroundings by introducing a phased culture-nature transition in the courtyards. We have seen a similar method of contextuality in Haus Lange and Haus Esters in Krefeld. Van der Laan covered the entire front square with an uninterrupted slab of asphalt (Van der Laan, 1975, 11). Entering the complex through the one small gateway that punctuates an otherwise solid wall, one arrives into a somewhat friendlier outside space: a small courtyard, laid with clinker and surrounded by brick, where columns reach up like trees. Following the light that leads the visitor through a set of small dark rooms, one arrives at the second courtyard, the cloister garden, once again a fully enclosed outside space, but now with actual green elements. The human hand is intentionally ever-present here, in the formal organisation of the garden and the neatly cut hedge boxes (Van der Laan, 1975, 22). Continuing onwards one arrives at the clock tower of the south facade through which one can enter an open field (once again neatly manicured), bordered by trees on all sides. Should one wish to continue onwards even further, one would enter thick woods that were perhaps once sown by human hand but where nature now rules.

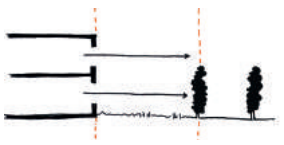


1.



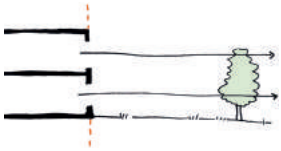
Closed facade, inward focus.

2.



Open facade, view limited by “second wall” beech hedge.

3.



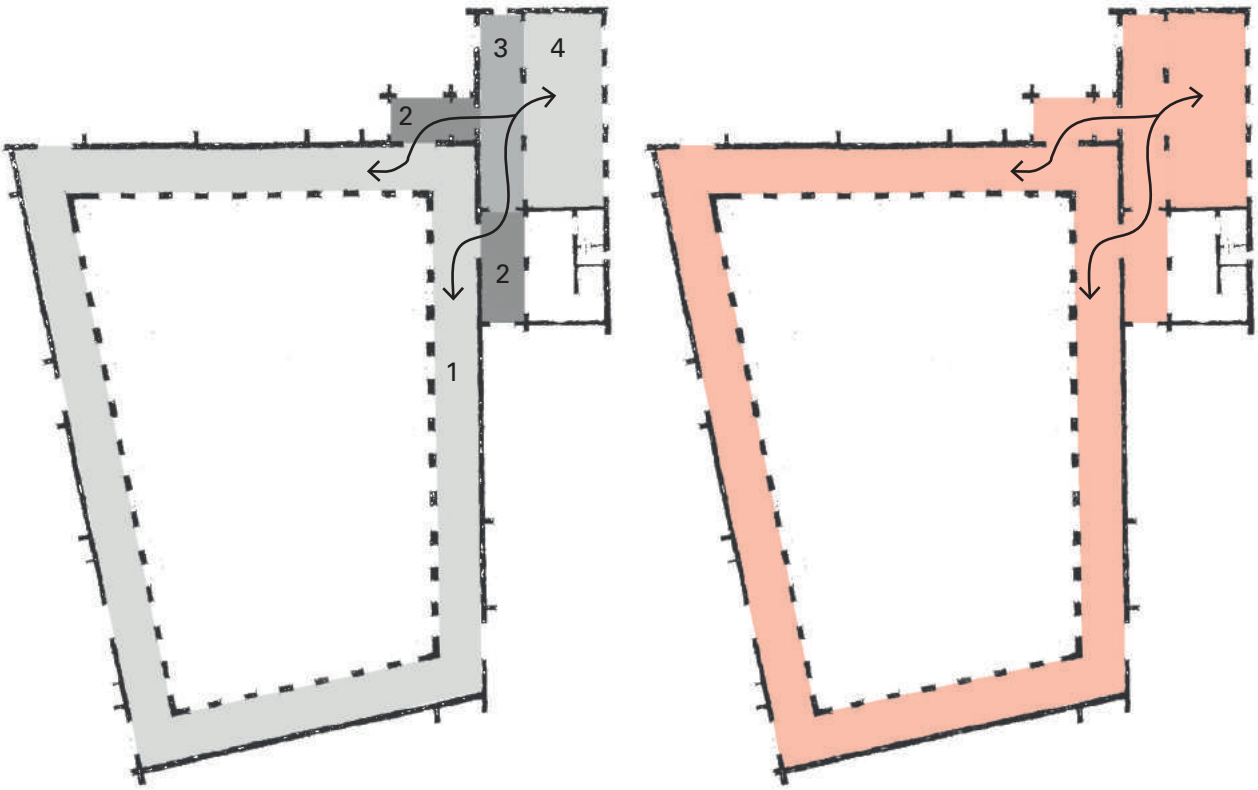
Open facade, open field, hidden entrance.

4.

Open facade, phased transition inside-outside, terrace as intermediate.

Fig. B95 – Interior-exterior relation: four degrees of openness

The facades respond differently to the gardens they are connected to, resulting in various degrees of openness and hospitality. The first facade one encounters is almost completely closed, apart from the entrance portal and a small French balcony. The east wing has many windows, but no doors and thus no direct connection to the garden. Outside lies a narrow stretch of lawn, bordered by a dense row of beech trees that create a sort of second wall, like we have seen several times in Hombroich (at the Labyrinth pavilion, for example). The south wing has again many window openings and even a door, but it is difficult to find, hidden in the clock tower. Through the windows, one finally has further reaching views of the open field and the woods behind the abbey. The fourth wing has large windows, to allow light into the workshop and library and one (somewhat easier to find) door. The transition from inside to outside is softened by a terrace flanked by walls on three sides and opening into the smaller garden for the nuns.



1. Cloister hall

2. Vestibule

3. Loggia

4. Room

Fig. B96 – Transition from cloister hall to guest refectory

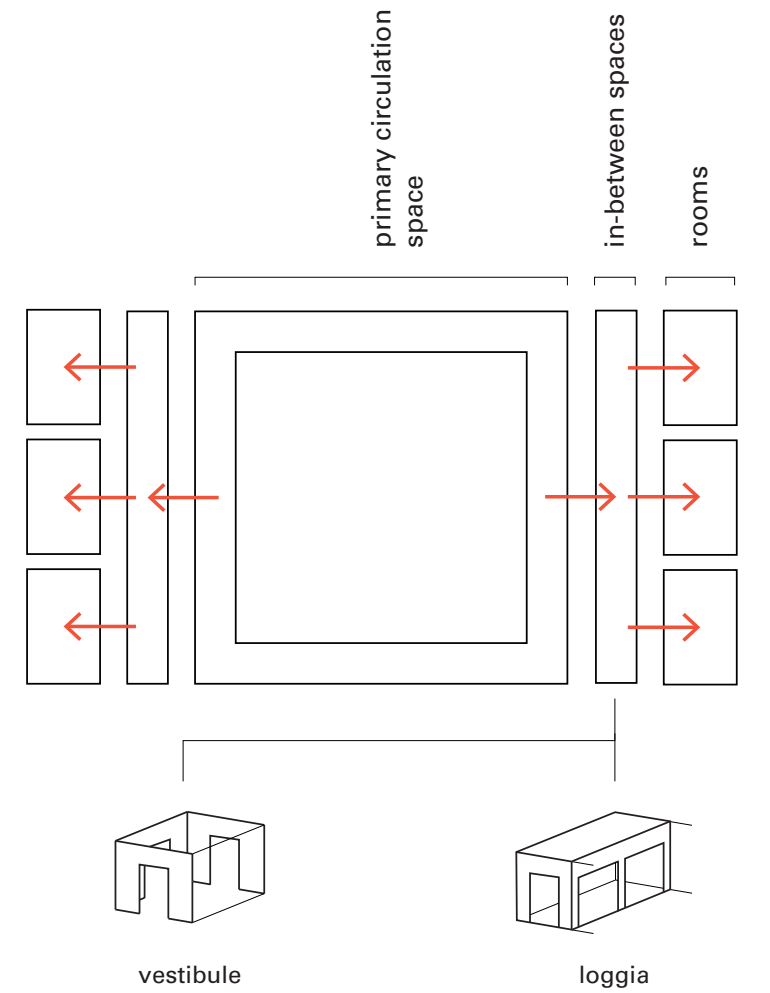
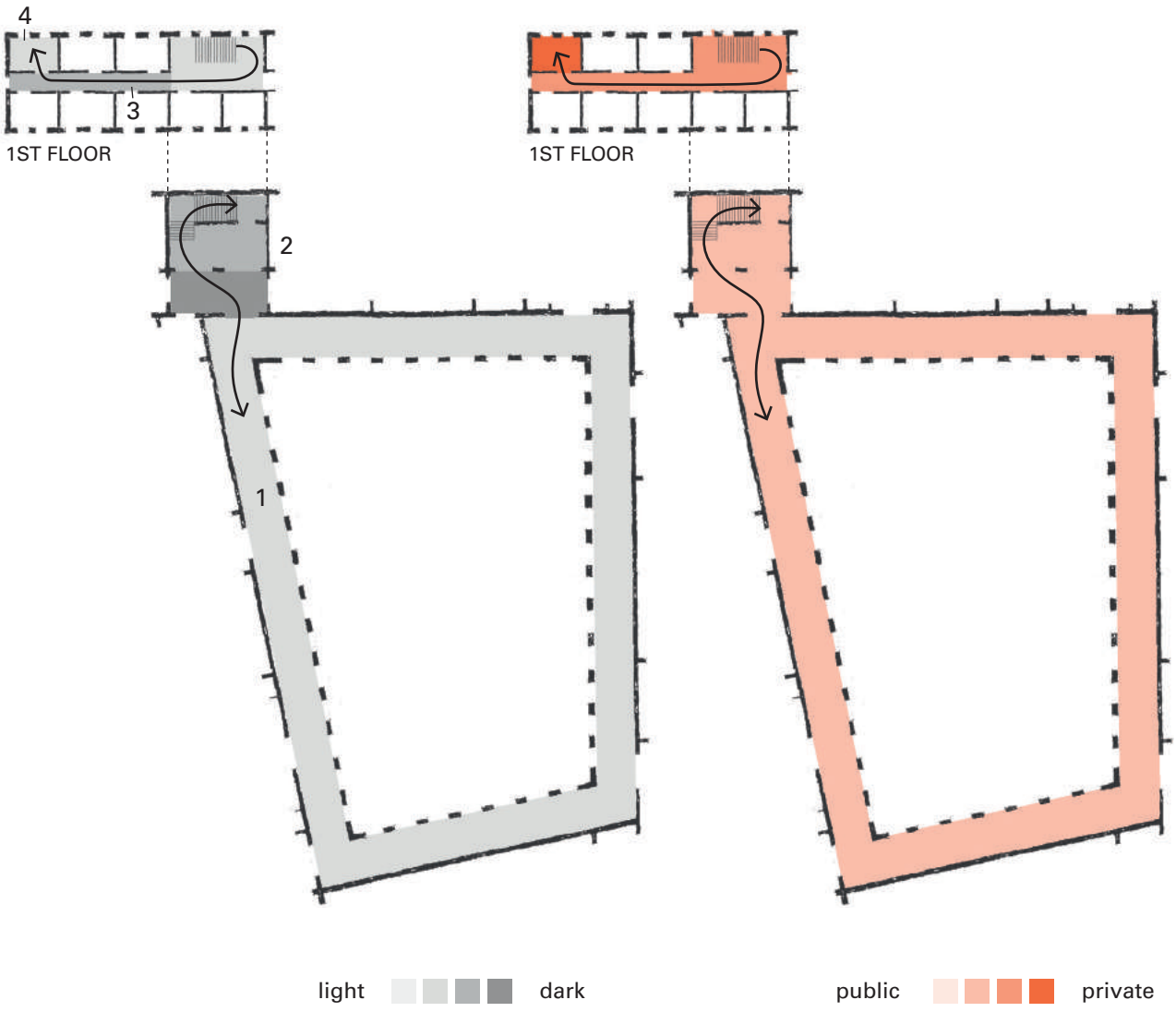


Fig. B97 – transition between circulation space and rooms is phased gradually.

Inside, the phased transition between spaces, functions and moods presents itself most explicitly. Van der Laan used a simple system: the cloister around the largest courtyard is the main circulation space, followed by a larger ring of secondary circulation spaces and then a third ring of rooms, each with a specific function, that have no in-between connections and can be entered and left only through the secondary circulation rooms. Phase 2 of this transition is translated specially in a, once again simple, set of two typologies: a vestibule and a loggia. The transitions are guided by light and shadow. The light guides the users through the complex, while the dark invites silence and contemplation (Van der Laan, 1975, 22).



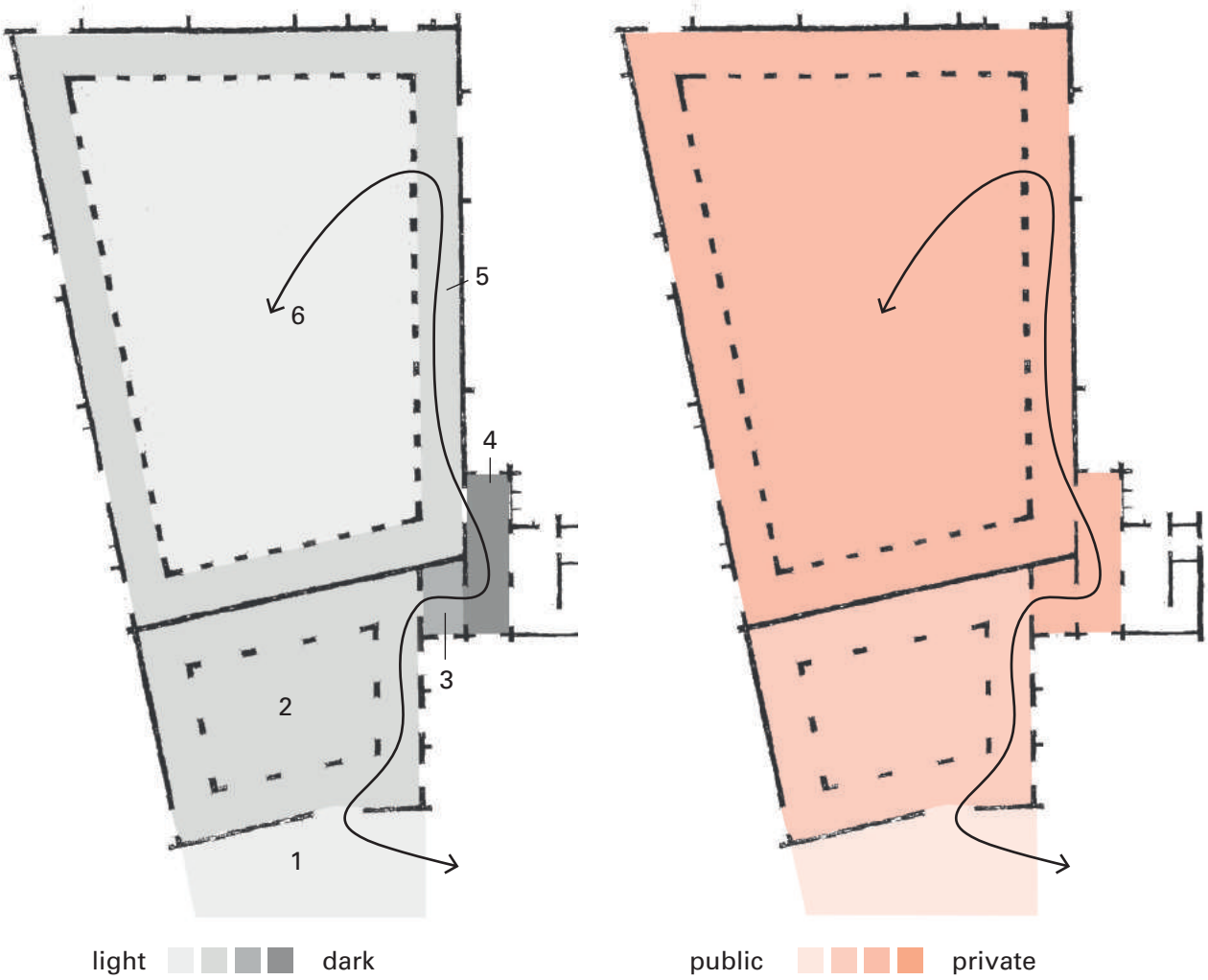
1. Cloister hall

2. Vestibule with staircase

3. First floor hallway

4. Private cell

Fig. B98 – Transition from cloister hall to nun's cell



2. Entrance courtyard

3. Entrance vestibule

4. Second vestibule with staircase

5. Cloister hall

Fig. B99 – Transition front court to cloister hall

Fig. B100 – Interior of the chapel

Fig. B101 – Cell doors coming out on the hallway on the first floor

Fig. B102 – Cell as seen from the hallway

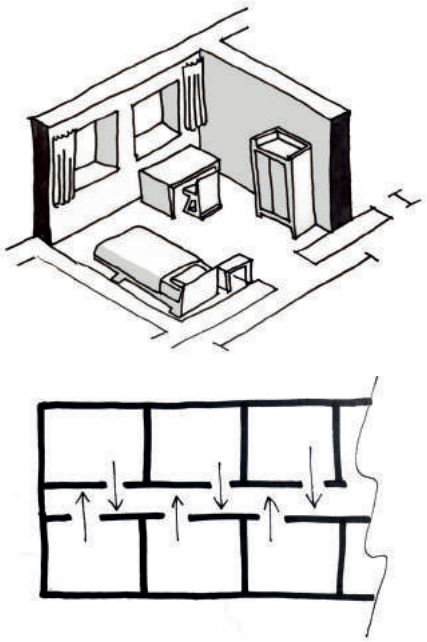


Fig. B103 – The individual sleeping cells with diagonally facing entrances

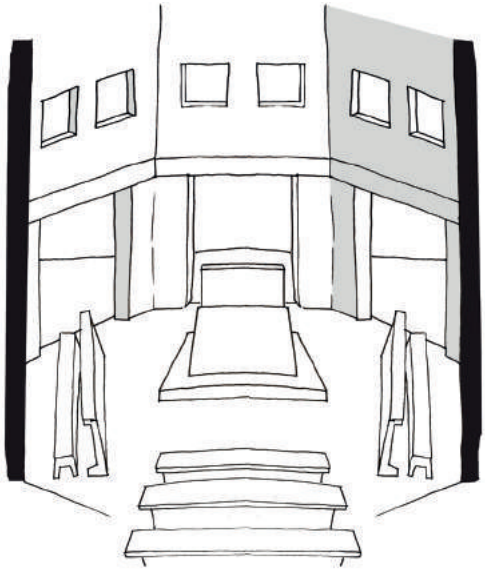


Fig. B104 – The church space where nuns, guests, and visitors gather.

Partly because of the clear distinction and phased transition between circulation space and residential quarters, movement and use become intentional, calculated, purposeful. Rooms in the outer ring are either for study, for work, for conversation, for leisure, for eating, for reception, for meditation and prayer or for sleeping. With these different function comes a series of relational "atmospheres", ranging from private contemplation to collective working or prayer. In this sense, the sleeping cells and the church space are designed as opposites. The first houses one individual, closed-off from the rest with a thick wooden door. Van der Laan did not mirror but rotate the rooms on the other side of the corridor, which means that the cell doors are never directly *vis-à-vis*, providing even more privacy. Each room looks out over the courtyard, the woods or the open field, luring the focus to nature. The church houses many and was in fact open to people outside of the abbey. Here, benches face each other and join together in a half-circle around the bench. Light comes from above, but the room itself has an inward focus, centring on the altar and congregation of people.

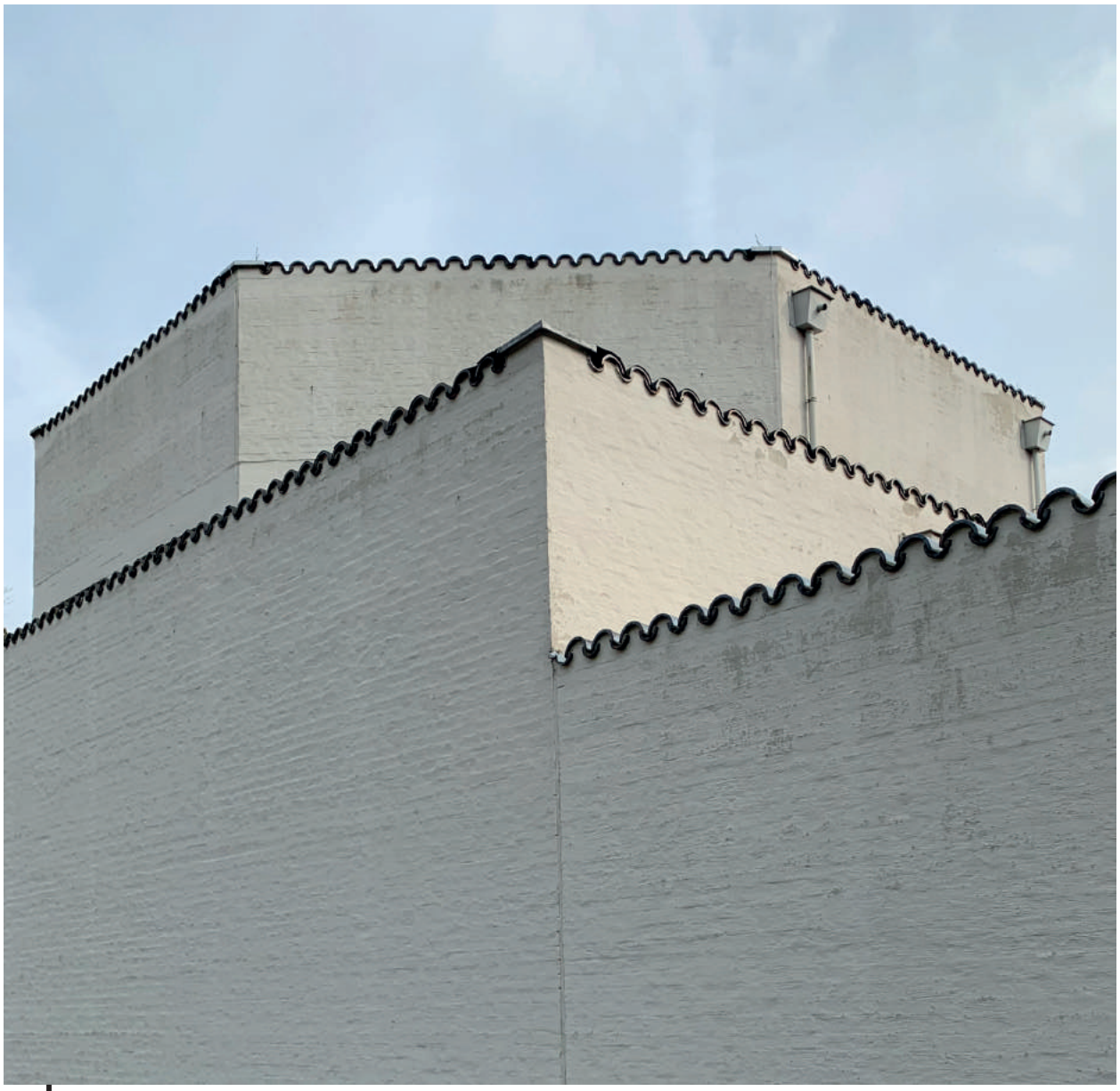


Fig. B105 – The chapel emerges above the wall seperating the abbey from the asphalt slab at its entrance.

In Abbey Roosenberg, Dom van der Laan realised his theories and equations of perfect architecture, resulting in a place of simplicity and serenity. Three important conclusions can be made:

The power of the in-between
Throughout the abbey and the terrain surrounding it, phased or gradual transitions guide the user and visitor. Every sequence consists of at least three steps and it is the middle one that is most important in the transition between spaces, activities and atmospheres.

Explicit movement and activity
These transitions create an important deceleration: by upgrading an otherwise unremarkable activity, such as entering a room or going outside, into an explicit event, the habitual becomes special. This has a slowing-down effect: here, circulation is not merely getting from one room to another, but it becomes an activity in itself. The separation of rooms for circulation and for "being" (eating, working, cooking, etc.) invites explicitness and awareness of use. Thus, the abbey responds to the highly routinous lifestyle of its inhabitants, but the use of space is never habitual or dull.

Reduction of outer impressions
Just as this functional clarity, the simplicity of the architecture and muting of colours create an atmosphere that allows one to turn inwards. The reduction of complexity in use and sensory experience leads to the reduction of external impressions and thus creates space for internal reflection and contemplation.

Get-away, other-worldliness
As we have seen in Hombroich, Abbey Roosenburg has an emphatic threshold (asphalt slab, wall, first courtyard, etc.) that moves inhabitant and visitor from one world into the other. Nestled in its clearing in the woods, the Abbey forms a sanctuary shut away from the life that moves on around it, allowing its inhabitants to live on their own rhythm. Inside, the repetition of elements, minimalism and clarity provide an attractive break from hectic life and work.

The beautiful and the sublime
In Abbey Roosenberg, we find elements both of the sublime and the beautiful. The seclusion of the rooms, the softness of the cement-coated walls and the presence of the different gardens provide tranquillity, while the infinity of the cloister hallway, the deep contrast of light and shadow and the starkness of the interior can have a more intense effect. To some, the reduction of form and bareness of the interior may be awe-inspiring and somewhat eerie, others may find peace and serenity in the simplicity and solitude. The abbey thus presents an interesting example of how architecture and landscape can together charm and move its beholders.

Fig. B106 – Caslte Slangenburg seen from the backyard

CASE STUDY 3

Castle Slangenburg

Location	Doetinchem, The Netherlands
Construction	17th century
Architect	Unknown

For approximately sixty years, the seventeenth-century Castle Slangenburg, located on a landscaped estate on the outskirts of Doetinchem in the east of the Netherlands, has been a place to unwind for many. Although the hospitality function has its roots in the Benedictine abbey nearby, religious practice and prayer are no longer explicitly included in a stay at the guest house. On the website, the target group is described in broad terms:

'The guest house is open to people of all beliefs:
- to singles and married couples;
- to young and old;
- to people who want to enjoy nature, meditate, read and take walks;
- to people who need space after a difficult time;
- for people who want to study or write in a tranquil environment;
- for people who are physically and mentally self-sufficient;
- in short: for all who long for peace and quiet and good care.'

(Kasteel Slangenburg, n.d., translated by the author)

Tranquillity, peacefulness and nature are the keywords here, but rhythm and clarity are also an important characteristic of a stay at this guest house. The prescribed daily routine includes three collective meals in the dining rooms, where all guests join at one large table. Throughout the day, guests and hosts (all volunteers) can come together in the living room for small-talk and conversation.

This case study, in contrast to the previous two, focusses not on the spatial characteristics of the landscape and architecture, but looks into the organisation and routine of the guest house in relation to the personal experiences of the guests themselves. The case study is based on a three-night stay that I spent at the castle in mid-May and thus takes the various guests I have met during that time as a point of departure.[1] The advantage of this is that the selection of people is random and diverse, the disadvantage is that it only looks into a limited number of guests, while the castle welcomes hundreds, if not thousands, a year. Nevertheless, the Castle attracts a great variety of people and if one makes an effort to interview those who may at first seem less eager to as well, this will result in a varied group of interviewees.

1 Due to the privacy of Slangenburg's guests and hosts, this case study lacks photographs of Slangenburg with people in them. Names of the guests that I have met and spoken with have been changed.

Fig. B107 – Mass in the nearby St. Willibrords Abbey (Joop van Reeken, willibrordsabdij.nl, n.d.)

Fig. B108 – Exterior of the nearby St. Willibrords Abbey (Joop van Reeken, willibrordsabdij.nl, n.d.)

Upon arrival, the guest is presented with a folder providing information, rules and a sort of code of conduct. The guest is informed that it is not allowed to work on a laptop in the living room, and that using a phone in communal areas is frowned upon. You are requested not to leave jackets, sweaters and shoes lying around, and not to walk through the house on bare feet or in socks. Keys should be left on the designated board in the kitchen when going out. In the living room, you will be served by the host and hostess and you should not help yourself to coffee or tea. Meals are taken collectively. You can play the pianoforte or harpsichord at set times and with the approval of the host or hostess. After 23:00, you are expected to stay in your room, as not to disturb the other guests.

Schedule

The information book also contains the daily schedule:

08:30 – 09:30	Breakfast
10:45	Coffee and tea in the living room**
12:00	Possibility to have a drink in the living room***
12:45	Dinner*
15:45	Coffee and tea in the living room**
17:00	Possibility to have a drink in the living room***
18:00	Supper*
19:45	Coffee and tea in the living room**
21:00 – 23:00	Possibility to have a drink in the living room***

* Collective meal, you are kindly requested to be in the dining room at said time.
** Optional, no extra fee.
*** Optional, extra fee.

Abbey schedule

The daily schedule is matched to that of the nearby Benedictine abbey, so that guests can visit the masses should they want:

06:15	Matins
07:30	Lauds (Morning Prayer)
09:30	Eucharist
12:15	Midday Prayer
17:00	Vespers (Evening Prayer) (Sunday 16:30, Thursday 17:30)
20:30	Compline

Fig. B109 – Private (one-bed) bedroom on top floor

Fig. B110 – Seating area in main corridor on top floor

Fig. B111 – Music room on first floor, above the central hall

Fig. B112 – Blue (reading) Room on ground floor

Fig. B113 – Living room with various groups of seating

Fig. B114 -The bigger dining room with one large table

A stay at the restaurant ranges from €67,50 to €145 for one person per night (January 2019). There are simple one-bed bedrooms, as well as larger decorated period rooms. The house is laid out with the main collective rooms on the ground floor: the living room, two dining rooms, the Blue Room, the office, the serving kitchen and the chapel. The latter is no longer used for religious purposes (in the past, mass was held here), but for yoga and meditation classes and occasionally concerts. In the large hall is a gong, to announce lunch and dinner. On the first floor are the larger period bedrooms, the library and the music room and the attic houses the smaller one- and two-bed bedrooms among the eaves. The collective rooms each have a specific function and "mood", prescribing the behaviour of guests. During the day and after dinner, the living room is the main social hub of the house. The hosts can mostly be found here, serving drinks and the sofas and chairs are set in different groups, creating intimacy in the large room. The dining rooms are more formal, guests meet here at set times and meals are opened by one of the hosts reciting a poem or inspirational guests. Dinner is served just after midday and consists of three courses. Supper is more simple, consisting of a small entrée, bread and toppings. The Blue Room is for reading and listening to classical music. It is a quiet room, not intended for extensive conversation. The library upstairs is for silent study. It used to be the only room with Internet connection (wired). Apart from these designated rooms there are various nooks and seats to make use of. It is interesting to study these different settings and the behaviour the invite, explicitly and implicitly. On the next pages, we study a range of six rooms spatially. Of each room, a personal experience or observation is discussed, exemplifying the use of and behaviour in these different rooms.

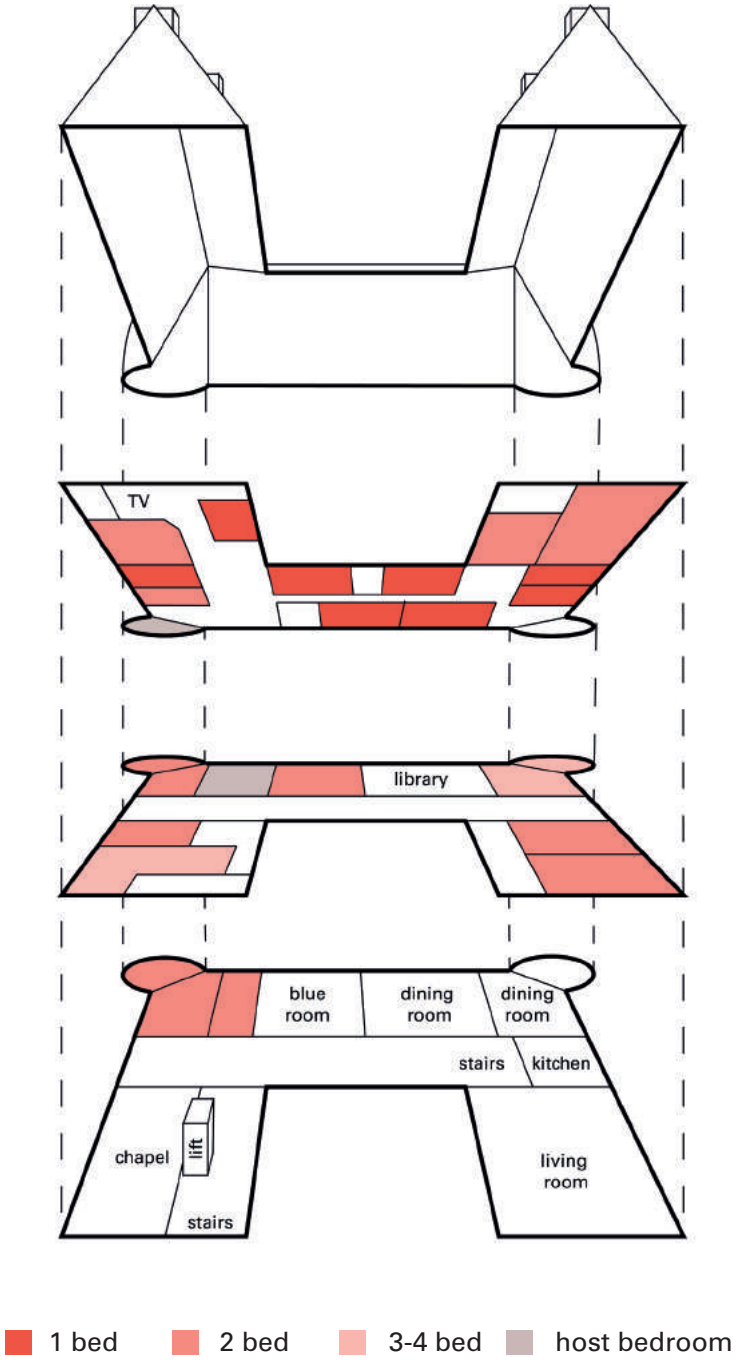


Fig. B115 – The individual sleeping cells with diagonally facing entrances

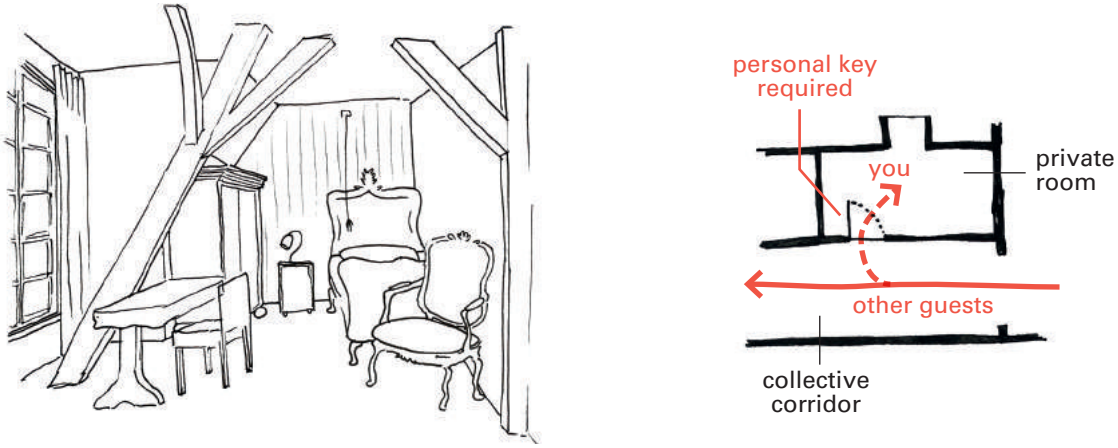


Fig. B116 – Private bedroom

I have not spend much time in my room other than at night. Guests are requested to retreat to their private room after 21:00, so every night I lay in bed reading. At night, the room felt cosy, during the day it felt somewhat confined, due to limited amount of windows (the window was blocked by one of the eaves). Discussing the rooms with one of the other guests however, I learned that she found her room, located in one of the towers and thus circular, very pleasant and spend most of her day studying there, in the serenity of her own space and looking out over the surrounding woods.

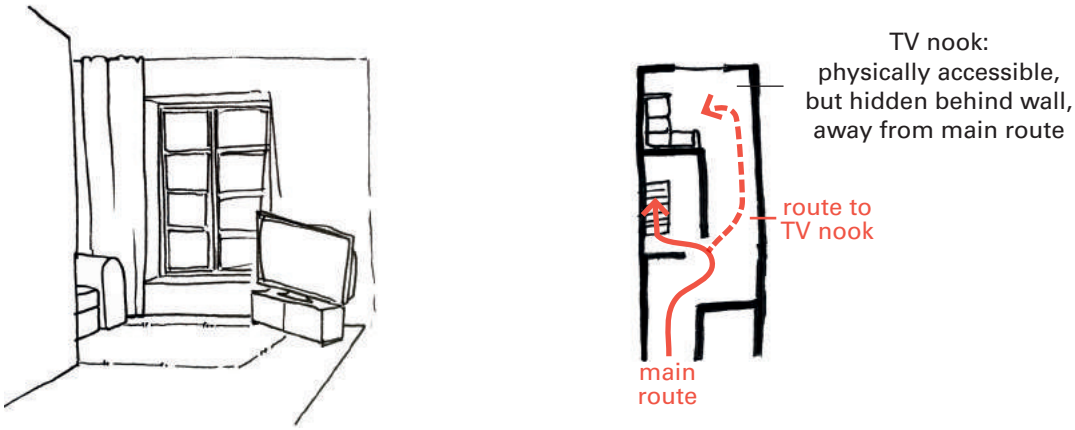


Fig. B117 –TV nook on top floor

The TV nook lies secluded at the end of the hallway in the attic, with a view over de front court. It provides a secluded place to meet, but also to meet others while watching the news in the evening.

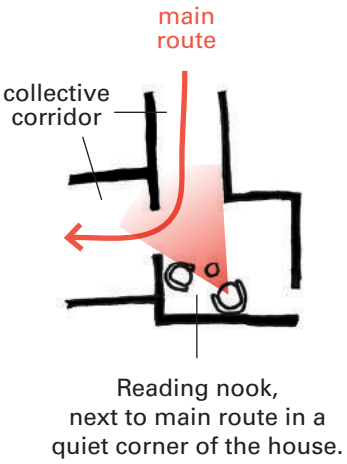
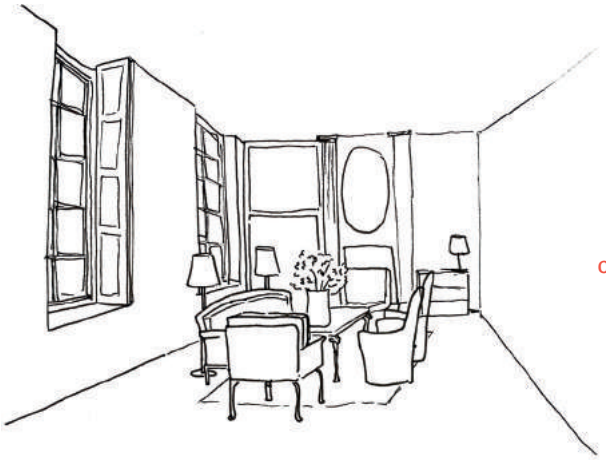


Fig. B118 – Reading nook on the top floor

I have not seen anyone using this seating nook. The reason that I did not use this space when I was looking for a more private space to read, is that it felt strange to sit in the hallway, within the view of passing guests going to or leaving their rooms.



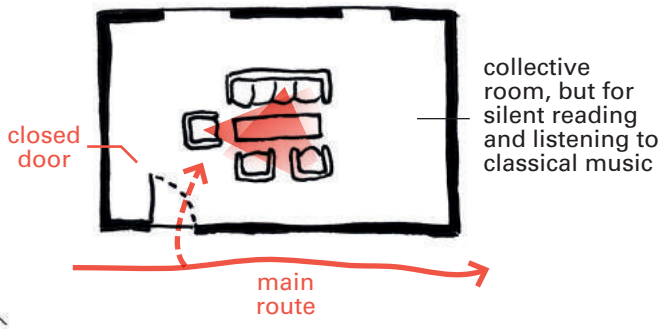


Fig. B119 – Blue (reading) Room

During my stay, I spent many hours in the Blue Room. Firstly, because it is a beautiful, regal room, with a stereo and classical music CDs, secondly because it is a tranquil alternative for the sometimes crowded living room. The views from the room over the back garden were very nice. I was often joined by one or two other people and even though there was only one set of seating furniture, our conversations were limited to one or two sentences, each guest understanding that the other had come to this room to read or sit in silence.

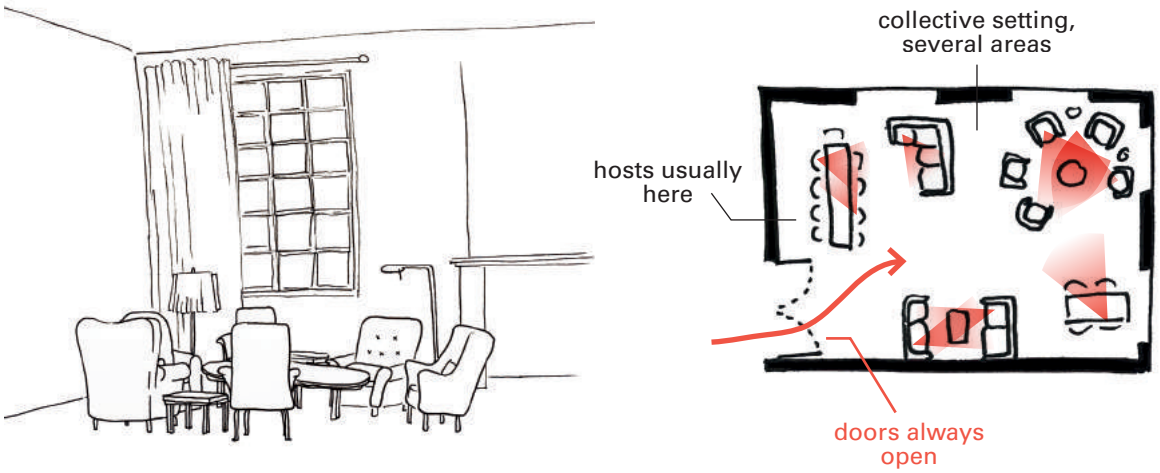


Fig. B120 – Living room

In between meals, coffee and tea was served in the living room. My experience during the day varied. Sometimes I felt like being surrounded by others and I would sit reading in the living room in between my walks through the surrounding park. Occasionally, I would have short conversations with others, but during the day it was relatively quiet. Sometimes I felt that room was too crowded and I would go to the Blue Room. After supper, like most of the other guests, I would usually sit down in the living room for a drink, and I noticed that both me and the other guests were more open to conversation. I would lay down my book and talk to the guests sitting around me in one of the seating nooks.

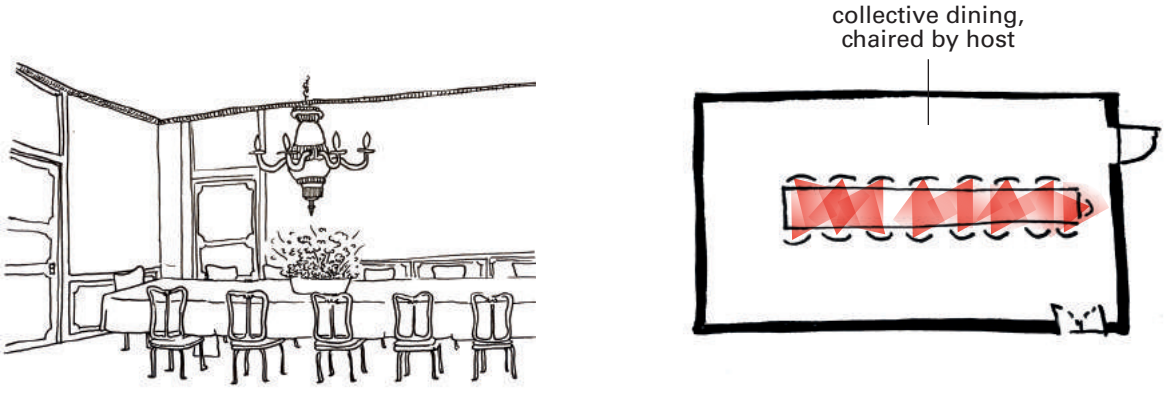


Fig. B121 – Dining room

As said, the meals are a more formal occasion. Everyone shares one large table, and conversation was always continuous. I did not always feel like talking, and I noticed others didn't either, but the setting was such that it was okay to eat quietly and listen to the conversations of others.

During my stay of three nights, I have met a lot of different people. Every time I came to the dining table, there would be some new faces and some familiar ones. Talking with them about their experience, I realised that, although everybody comes to Slangenburg primarily for tranquillity, nature and peace of mind, we each have different reasons and preferences when it comes to our stay.

Thea

During my first dinner, I set next to Thea, recently retired and avid hiker and cyclist. This was her first time at the castle, and I met her on her second day. She had come with a friend. At first, our conversation was somewhat superficial (where are you from, what do you do, etc.) and we mostly ate quietly, but once we had found a shared interest, conversation went easier. When I asked Thea whether she had enjoyed her stay so far, she hesitated and answered that she did not know yet. 'I prefer to have more freedom of choice and decide for myself when and what I am going to eat,' she said. The surroundings were beautiful, though, she emphasised. That night we met again in the living room, and she was somewhat more outgoing. She and her friend had just visited the Compline mass at the abbey and she had admired the ceremonial rituals and mystical setting. The next morning, I noticed she was again more talkative at breakfast. She would leave later that morning. When asked if she would return to the castle sometime, she said that she probably would not.

Tom

The friend that had brought Thea to the castle and joined her during her first stay was Tom. He himself had come here several times before. The content of conversations with Tom tended to be limited to Slangenburg, its surroundings and its history. It was clear that it was a special place to him. Throughout my stay I found him stating questions and facts about the Slangenburg to different guests. It was important to him that Slangenburg is called a *gastenverblijf*, a guest house, and not a hotel. 'It is more than a hotel. "*Verblijf*", that suggests a home,' he would say. At the end of his stay, he said he was reluctant to leave and booked another night. All three nights that I was there, he spent the evenings in the living room, talking with other guests about their days and about Slangenburg.

Eleanor

Eleanor, a woman of about 35, has a busy job at a large institution and works as a yoga teacher in her spare time. She, too, is a regular guest and tries to go to the Castle two or three times a year, but also goes on yoga and meditation retreats in other places throughout the year. She is a calm woman, we talked sporadically during meals, and went to the abbey together. She comes to Slangenburg to read, to walk and to relax, and knows most of the hosts and hostesses. She travels Doetinchem by train, a journey of over four hours, but this is no problem, it gives her time to 'descend into the weekend'. On the journey back, it gives here a couple more hours of peace and quiet. She appreciates the routine at Slangenburg, and the fact that it never changes and that she always knows what to expect of her stay.

Eva

Eva, a solicitor living in Utrecht, is doing a part-time post master degree. Over the last four months, she has spent one long weekend a month at Slangenburg to work on her assignments. She would spend long days in her room and came down for meals. She comes her to study for several reasons: it presents a break from usual life, allowing her to focus, the environment calms her and the rhythm of the meals forces her to take breaks and resurface from concentration. She was working on her final assignment when I met her, but was planning on coming back sometime, this time to fully enjoy the slowing-down experience and explore the surroundings.

Lia

During several diners and suppers, I sat next to Lia, an elderly, but agile woman, who had been at Slangenburg many times. This time, she had brought a friend. Together, they would take short walks, and she showed her companion all the highlights. They visited the monastery several times and waved insistently from their car if I encountered them during my walks. During meals, Lia told me about the places she had visited that

day – the labyrinth at the protestant church, the urn field, a particular pond. It was difficult to have a conversation, because she was partly deaf, but she did tell me she often opted for the smaller dining room so she could follow bits of the conversation there. ‘When there’s young people talking, I am all ears. They know many new things, and I have to listen carefully to make sure I understand them.’

Adhira

Adhira is a young woman, who is currently in a long recovery process after brain injury. Because of this injury, she is highly sensitive to outer stimuli and was looking for a place to rest when she came upon Castle Slangenburg. Throughout the day, she would take naps and short walks, or read in the Blue Room or living room. This was here second visit and the place had proven advantageous for her psychological recovery. During meals, she would sometimes stay to herself, but often have an intent conversation with other guests.

Lidewij

An approximately fifty year old woman, Lidewij was usually cheerful, talkative and humorous. She comes to Slangenburg regularly and was easy to connect with. She usually took part in bigger conversations during meals – that is: between a group of people instead of just two or three. During the day, she read books or walks, at night, she had wine in the living room. She was very warm and comfortable to be around. She appreciates the everyday rhythm of Slangenburg and hopes it will stay like this for a long time.

Chris and his son

For the first time, Chris (mid-fifties) had brought his son (early twenties). They did not talk much during dinners, not among themselves, nor with others. Sometimes one of them made a short comment, usually when asked, but otherwise, they were quiet. During the days, I did not see them.

Barend

During dinners, Barend sometimes makes a comment on something political or otherwise societal, but he came out of his shell at night in the living room. Here, he explained that he is a very active member of his bridge club and manages the club house. He has done so for many years, since his partner passed away. Talking about his partner made him sad, but it was clear that he wants to share his feelings. He said that he often feels lonely and comes to Slangenburg for warm hearts and worthwhile conversations: ‘Just to be among some similar minded people.’

Pieter and Mary

Pieter and Mary are an outgoing couple, always looking for conversation. Both during meals and in the living room (where they were most of the time), they predominantly talked together or with others. They come here mostly for the convivial atmosphere.

Conclusion

This small selection of people I met during my stay shows the spectrum of different motives, expectations and preferences that lure people to Slangenburg. What binds (most of) them, especially the recurring guests, is the affection for the castle itself and the landscape surrounding it. Some come to study, some to wind down, some to do as little as possible. Some are eager to meet and converse with others, some less so. Some highly appreciate the routine and the expected, others prefer more freedom.

Also interesting is the atmosphere of amicable familiarity. Shortly after my arrival, I note that both hosts and other (regular) guests are very emphatic about addressing each other by the first name. This sets the scene for a weekend not shared with distant others, but with temporary friends.

The hosts

The hosts are a very important part of Slangenburg. Not only organisationally (pouring tea and coffee, opening meals, managing arrivals and departures), but also for the atmosphere. All of them are volunteers and they swap every two or three days, on average. They are all different (some strict, other almost as relaxed as the guests), but their warm welcome and almost unnoticeable social management during meals and in the living room make sure that guests are attended to according to their personal preferences.

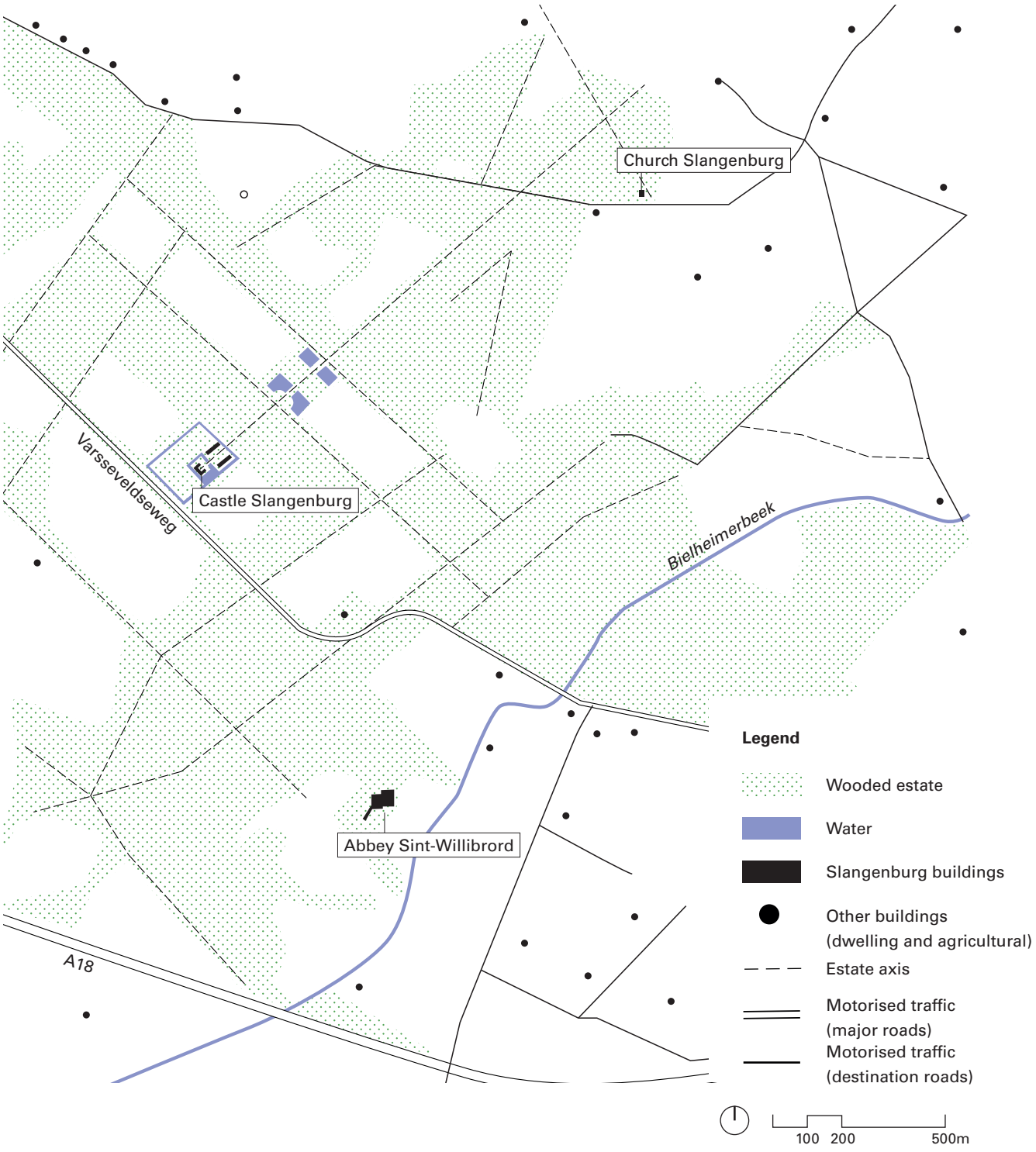


Fig. B122 – Map of the Slangenburg estate with long axes extending into the landscaped park

The castle is set in a landscaped estate with long axial roads that stretch far into the surrounding countryside (fig. B123 and 124. The main avenue on the central axis leading to the castle measures over 1.5 km. The roads penetrate the woodland and are interconnected by narrow, half-hidden, winding paths (fig. B125 and 126). Occasionally, one stumbles upon a small clearing or pond. The woodland is surrounded by wide and productive agricultural fields and country roads, reinforcing Slangenburg and its woodland's position as a hidden, other-worldly enclave.

Authenticity

There has been a castle on this side of Doetinchem since the fourteenth century. This sense of oldness is very present in the landscape surrounding Slangenburg. Most of the axial landscape was laid out in the 17th century and many trees are over 300 years old. Together with the rich traditional interior of the castle and the mostly agricultural and rural surroundings, this sense of oldness and little change (in relation to the strong presence of seasonal cycles of the woods and fields) has a strong and soothing other-worldliness about it. Even though everyday life is never far away – it is present in the cars that zoom past over the nearby Varsseveldseweg, the inhabitants of the surrounding farms and former farm houses and the easy access into Doetinchem – it is not hard to forget about the world outside of Slangenburg here.

Rootedness

Slangenburg lies at the heart of the estate at the meeting point of several axes. From the castle's rooms, one can look out over the long central axis and its surrounding woodlands. This, and the historical connection between the castle's architecture and the typology of the landscape sets the scene for a convincing, almost historical experience and a strong sense of place, and rootedness within that place, even to the short-term visitor.

Impossible to get lost, easy to roam

The system of long axes, even though they are not laid out in a strong axial or grid-like structure, provide for easy orientation with the possibility to get temporarily lost. The axes provide long sight lines and recognisability, while the winding paths in between them cater to those who prefer some mindless and aimless wandering. This makes the landscape easy to read, while still maintaining the possibility to be surprised or confused for short periods of time. Very easily, the landscape surrounding the castle feels familiar.

At the same time, the former estate harbours both the mystery and the seclusion and refuge that comes with small woodlands. Walking the long axial roads has an interesting effect: they seem infinite until you are almost at the end. The scenery does not change much, making it possible to walk for one kilometre without noticing you have covered any distance at all. The linearity and roof-like canopy of branches and leaves provide security and a sense of safety, while the woodland surrounding it feels secluded and impenetrable.

Solitude

Lastly, the dense and versatile woodland provide a welcome solitude. Within the castle, one has a strong sense of togetherness, of being part of a temporary household with all its social quirks and obligations. Outside of it, the woods provide the opportunity to hide, to seek refuge, even to hurry down a narrow side path when seeing a fellow castle guest dooming up on the horizon of an axial road.

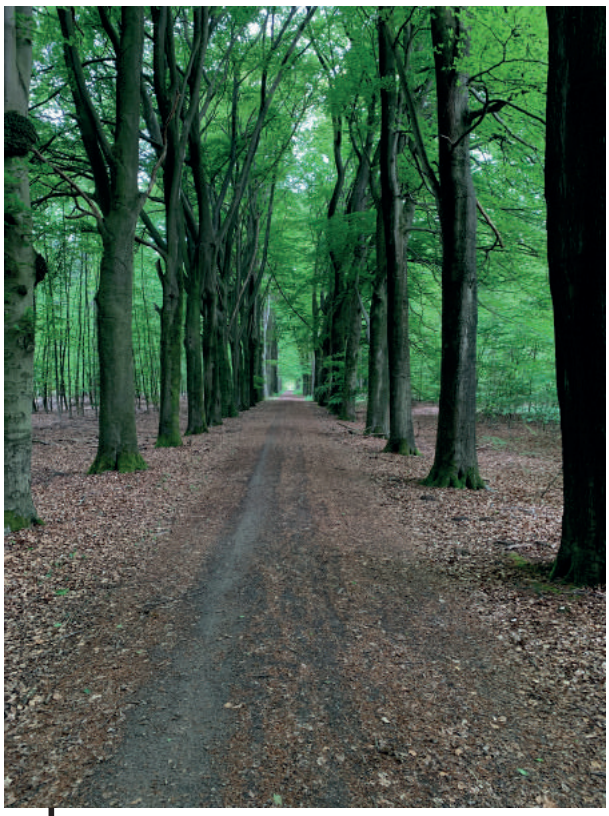


Fig. B123, B124 – Long axial paths bordered by mature and younger trees

Fig. B125, B126 – Winding paths through the denser woodlands.

Different people, different preferences.
Slangenburg teaches us a valuable lesson. Even though *bezinning* in nature is a strong, shared motive for its guests, their experience, preferences and motivations differ widely. Some highly value the social interaction, others look for solitude and withdrawal. Slangenburg provides a somewhat unique social atmosphere. It is emphatically not a hotel, but more like a temporary home, where meetings and conversations are more informal, less forced. The range of rooms and nooks provide to some of these wishes and preferences, but the overall collectivity of Slangenburg, the feeling of sharing a house for a certain period of time, does make one feel like part of a group, in which everyone continues to have a social responsibility towards one's fellow guests and hosts (such as: retreating after 9 pm, being open to conversation in the living room, eating collectively, and the more general sense of continually being surrounded by people). Additionally, the variety of rooms can be considered somewhat lacking. While the collective rooms (dining room, living room, Blue room) each have a clear function, as do the private bedrooms, the "in-between"-spaces were more sparse, less attractive and hidden.

While to some, the rhythm and rules of Slangenburg provide welcome clarity, no surprises, the chance to re-centre everyday routines, the strict daily schedule is too much of an obligation to others. To them, the routine feels like a limitation to their freedom. They prefer to schedule meals themselves, to be able to go out into the woods without a time limit, to eat when wanted. To those of the first category, the prescribed rhythm provides them with the opportunity to focus on other things and to surrender, to give up worries about responsibilities and minor details such as day planning. To those who have come to Slangenburg to study and work, the schedule helps them to stay focussed in between meals, with the prospect of refreshments and social interaction at set times. While the rules and daily schedule are seen as imperative by some, they do regulate the collectivity of Slangenburg. They are the clearest way of ensuring that everyone knows what to expect of one's stay and can place oneself into the temporary household of the castle.

The cases and their spatial and atmospherical characteristics studied in this section will provide inspiration throughout the design process. They are all interesting examples of bezinnings-landscapes and environments, yet for different reasons. Hombroich Museum Insel, enclosed by its valley, invites different modes of experience and contemplation. Both freedom and behaviour are free here, the most important aspect is that this landscape and its pavilions set the scene for a gradient of intense and soothing experiences of the park. The Insel lies as a fantasy-like land hidden from the world zooming on alongside and over it.

Abbey Roosenberg presents a much more everyday environment – although the life once lived here will be very different to that of most of us. Here, through geometrical repition, heightened simplicity and an articulated use of space, a strict rhythm of life is orchestrated. Each room has a prescribed function and movement and change of activity are choreographed through explicit transitions and in-between spaces. All of this creates focussed, intensely serene and devotional atmosphere.

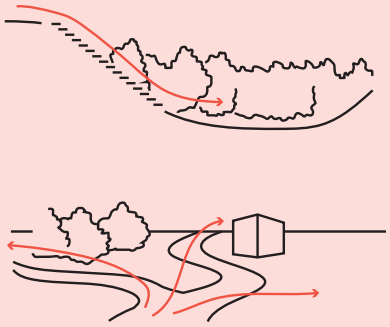
Life in Slangenburg is rooted in a similar strict rhythm, yet its current function as a guest house is built around the feelings of freedom of a get-away. Carefreeness and escapism are the main goal of the rules and organised social interaction.

In each of the case studies, nature – in all of its manifestations – constitutes not only the ever-present backdrop, but the main focal point, the reason that you are there, the roots of the experience.

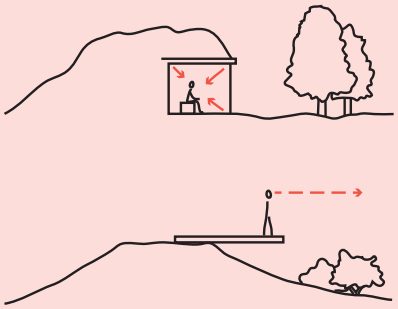
Apart from many (landscape) architectural and spatial solutions, we can take some key lessons from these case studies that will be of great help when designing the *bezinnings*-landscape of the Amaliahoeve.

Hombroich Museum Insel

1 Careful synthesis of landscape and architecture intensify the experience. In Hombroich, the pavilions have been implemented beautifully in the carefully choreographed landscape. Architecture and landscape work together and create beautiful and sublime moments of high intensity.



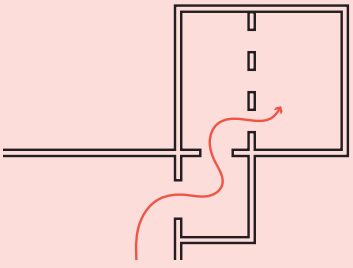
2 The importance of a threshold and borders. The way you stumble from the car park through a stark pavilion that holds many promises for more and down the steep stairs into an Arcadian valley is a vital element of the successfulness of Hombroich.



3 The possibility of carefree roaming. Due to the limited size of the Museum Insel, the variety of wide and narrow paths, the presence of landmarks and the diverse openness and enclosedness of the landscape, it is easy to lose yourself and wander freely.

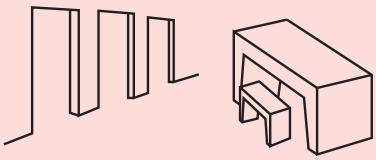
Abbey Roosenberg

1 The power of phased transitions and articulated use and movement.



2 The power of (extreme) simplicity and repetition. Even though Dom van der Laan may not have

escaped the subjectivity of architecture all together, the stark and repetitious lay-out and design of the abbey create an atmosphere of devotional serenity and purposefulness.



Castle Slangenburg

1 One's relation to others (both physically and socially) is a highly determent factor in the bezinnings-experience. The bezinnings-landscape should orchestrate this relation, but not dictate it.
2 Personal preference differs highly when it comes to privacy, activity and motive, and the bezinnings-landscape should cater to these differences.

Interested in this personal difference, I asked some of my fellow Slangenburg guests – as I had asked friends and family members – if they would draw and describe the place or moment they associate with relaxation, contemplation and bezinning. Some of these drawings are included on the following pages.

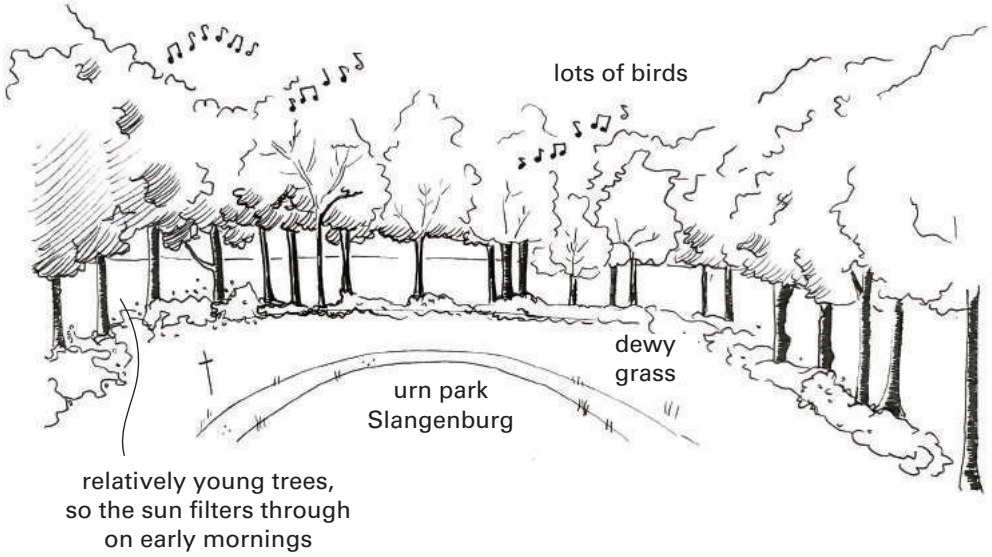
Places and moments of *bezinning*

Several people of various ages and sexes were asked to draw and describe the place or moment they associate with relaxation and/or bezinning. The exact question there were asked was: '*waar of wanneer ervaar jij ontspanning en bezinning?*' Responses varied greatly, varying from distant memories to everyday environments, from solitude to collectiveness. The fact that the respondents were asked to draw their place or moment encouraged them to include details that they might not have considered when simply explaining the place or moment. The drawings shown here are a more legible version of the original scribbles. No details were added.

The purpose of this mini-research is not to scientifically and quantitatively study the preference of as much people as possible, but as an illustration of what people associate with the *bezinnings*-landscape and how their preferences differ.

01

Woman, 75+



Sometimes, I go to the urn field of the cemetery [of Castle Slangenburg]. On early mornings, when the grass is still wet with dew, the sun filters through the trees and it feels very mystical and dreamy. Do I think about the buried? No, not really, it feels more like one of nature's gardens.

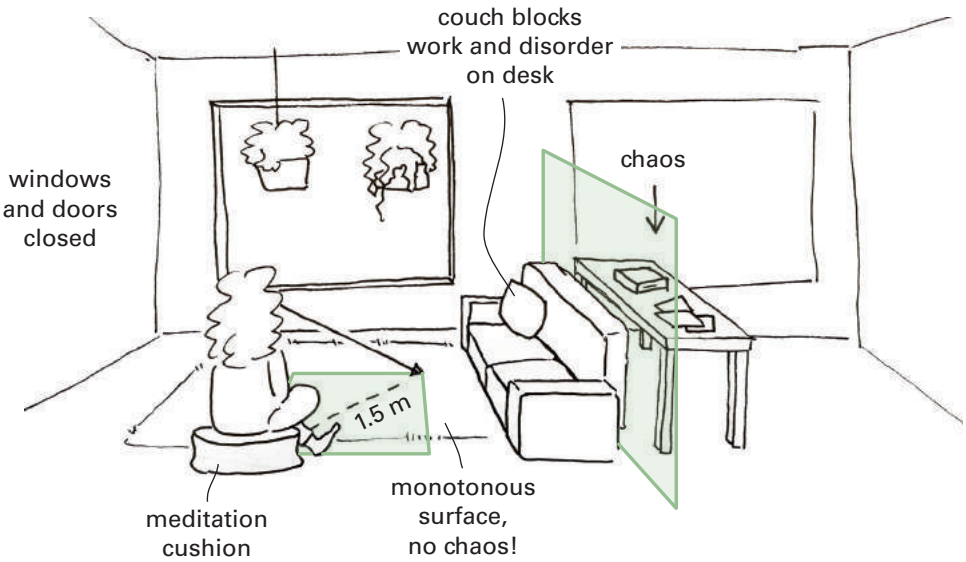
02

Woman, 60+

My yoga room is completely empty apart from my mat and an enormous Monstera plant. When I meditate or take it easy during yoga practice, I focus on the plant. Why? I don't know, there is just so much to look at, it is a very intricate plant.

03

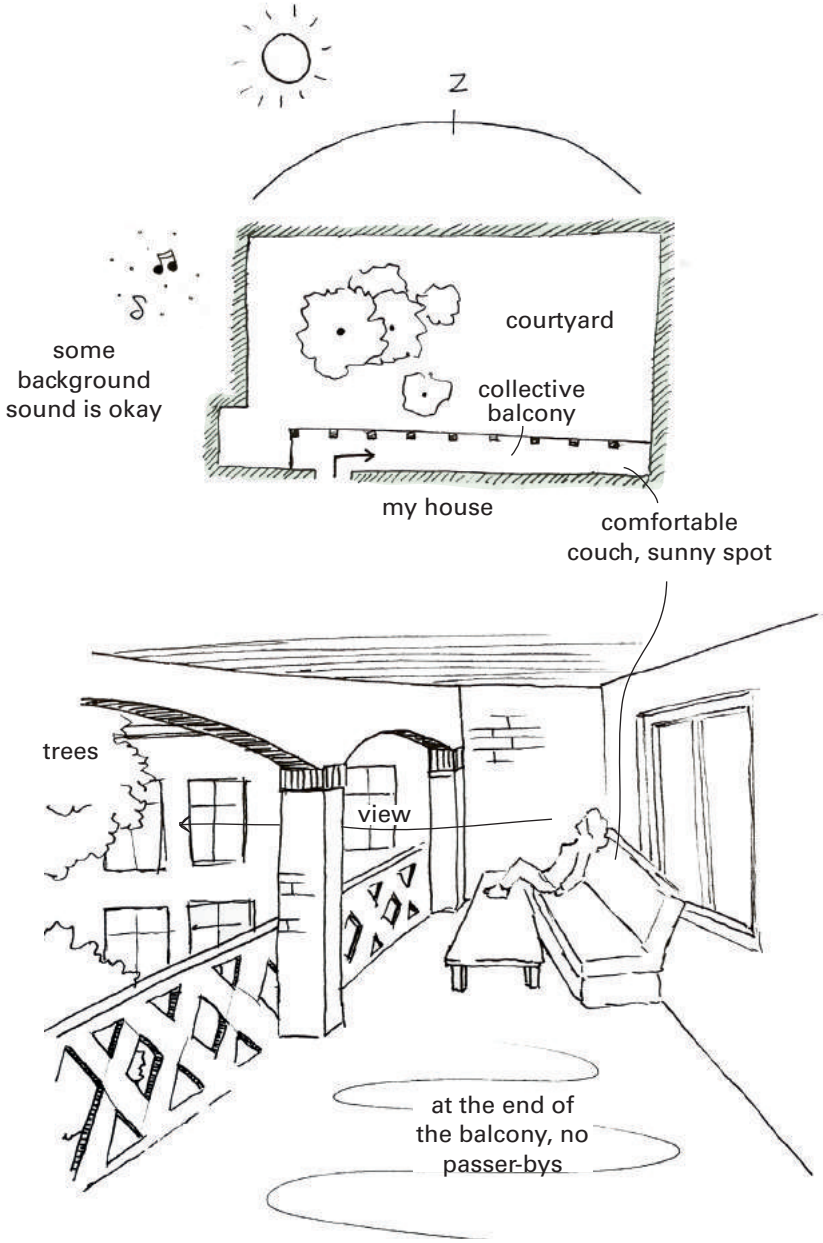
Woman, 24



My place of bezinning is my meditation cushion in my bedroom. When meditating, I focus on the floor 1.5m in front of me. Within that area, the space should be clean and ordered.

04

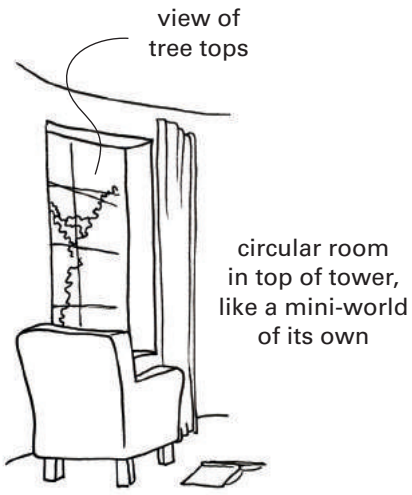
Woman, 23



At the end of the balcony that I share with my flatmates, in the sun.
I don't like complete silence, it is nice to know that I am not alone.

05

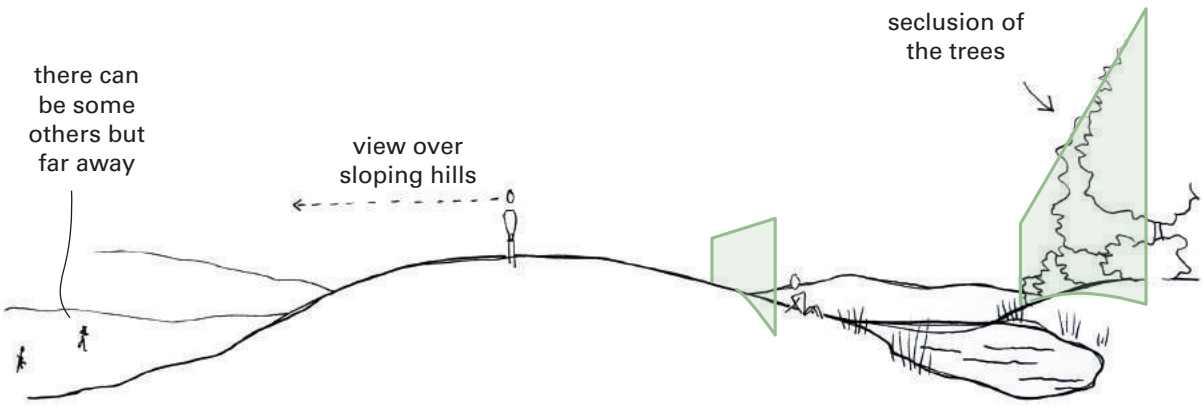
Woman, 30+



When I go to Slangenburg, I try to book the top-of-the-tower room. I love to sit in a chair looking out over the tree tops and reading my books. I forget about everything else around me, it is just me and my little, circular tower room.

06

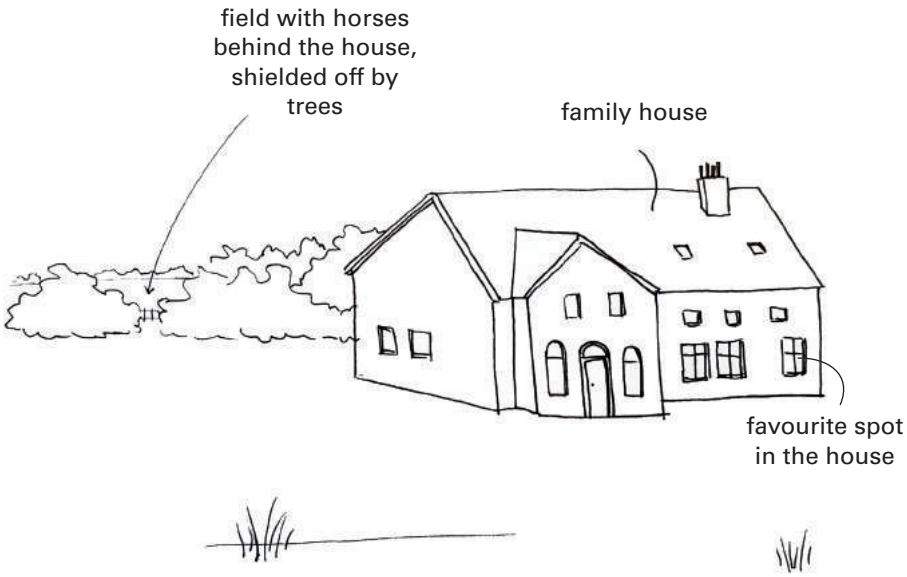
Woman, 24



In the hills, after or on a long walk, either alone or with people close to me.

07

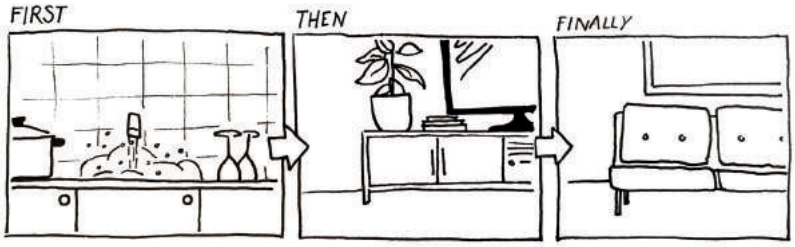
Woman, 30+



It's my family's vacation house, a monumental farmhouse in the countryside of Drenthe. I'm usually here with a lot of family. I like to sit at the front window overlooking the field, or in the field behind the house, away from others.

08

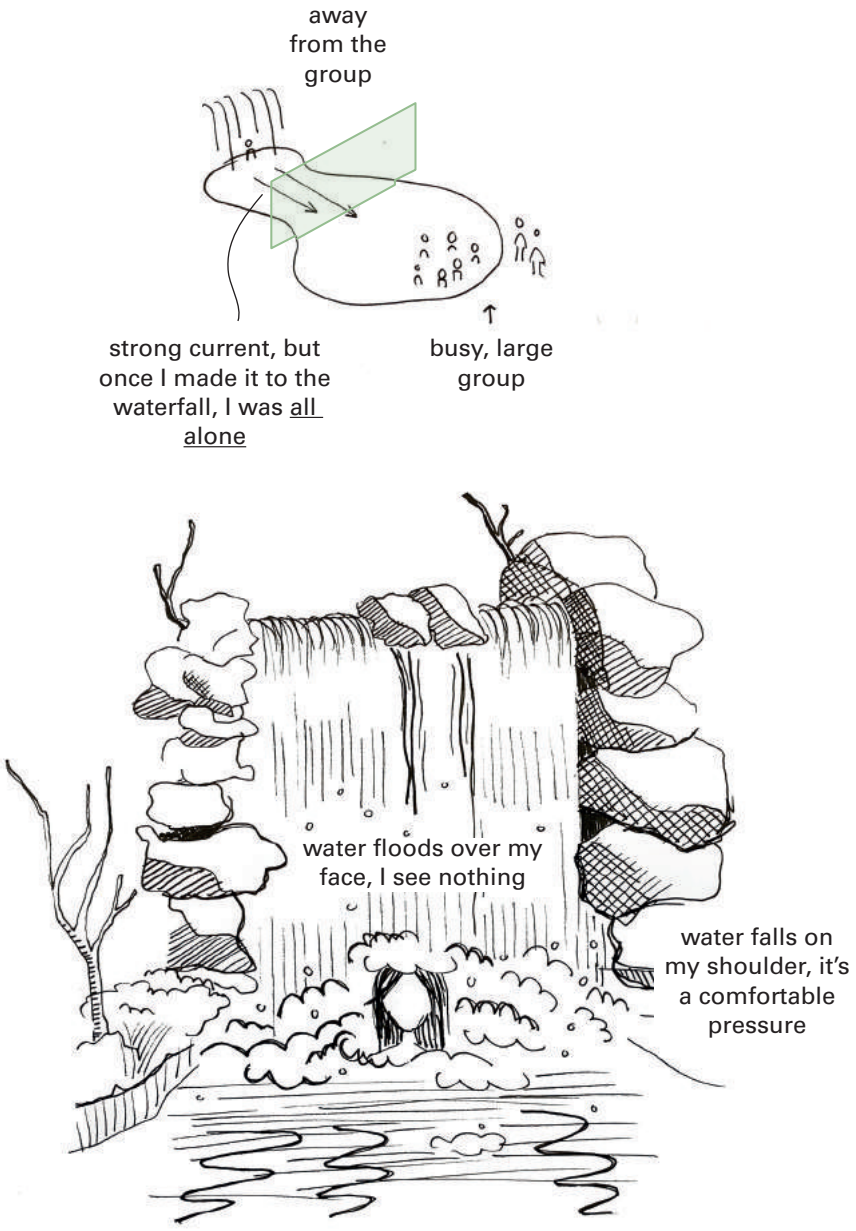
Man, 24



I don't really think I have a place where I feel most relaxed... I like to clean up the house after dinner, organise everything and then sit on the couch at the end of the day. That's when I feel relaxed.

09

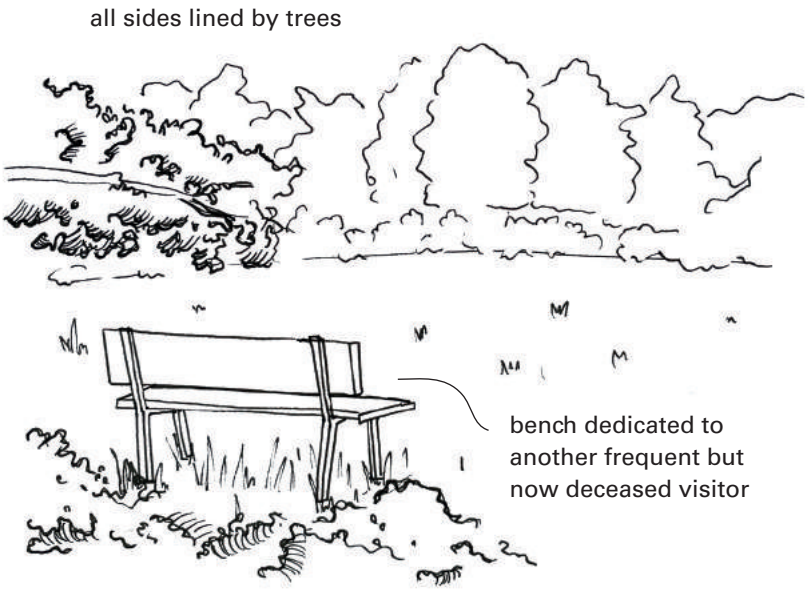
Woman, 26



I was on a group travel in Australia. At a waterfall, I was able to escape the group for a while and swam to the waterfall. In the pounding water, I experienced a feeling of surrender. The water falling around me and running over my face drowned out everything else.

10

Woman, 50



A small field on the estate of Slangenburg. Or maybe it is more like a large clearing. It is in the middle of dense woods, and it has just the right size. I like to sit on the bench near the edge and just look at the field for a while. I have been a regular guest at Slangenburg for years now, and it can still happen that I am taking a walk without any particular direction and suddenly stumble upon my field.

Conclusions

What I noticed during the interviews is that a lot of interviewees described explicitly their position in relation to others: whether others were close-by, audibly present on the background, visibly present but far-removed, completely absent, etc. To almost everyone, the relation between the individual and others was an important criterion for places of *bezinning*. Additionally, quite a few of the interviewees described not only the place itself, but expanded on its borders and what was outside of those borders. The extent of their places of *bezinning* were shaped by trees, walls, panoramic views or an invisible border that should not be crossed by others. Lastly, the term *bezinning* was interpreted widely. It reminded some of an intense experience that they'd had on a long-ago vacation, while others interpreted as an every-day state they reach during meditation practice or after daily chores.

SECTION C

SITE ANALYSIS

Fig. C1-4 – Shots from the boat of my first encounter with the Biesbosch (17 January 2019). The farm on the bottom right image is the Amaliahoeve.

Once a world of arduous work, now a sanctuary

Site choice

The Biesbosch is a wondrous landscape. Its misty banks and winding creeks envelop you as soon as you step into this world. It is a dynamic landscape, where water and the seasons dominate. But it is also a landscape that is frozen in time, with remnants of hazardous work and draughty nights in damp shacks.

Where once underpaid labourers set out on Monday mornings for a full week of tough work and meals of mouldy bread and boiled potatoes, we now embark on comfortable motor boats that will take us away from work, hardship and worry. A world of burden, of labour, of the everyday, of privation, of hierarchy, of cold and of necessity has become a world of stillness, of simplicity, of harmony, of recreation, of the extraordinary and of escapism.

The Amaliahoeve in the Biesbosch came on my path when I discussed my plan to design a contemplation landscape in a predominantly natural environment with a colleague, who forwarded me to Jan Janse, senior heritage advisor at Staatsbosbeheer. Located on the Amaliapolder (also called polder Kwestieus) is a monumental farm, the Amaliahoeve, consisting of a grand, largely unoccupied barn, a villa-like farm house and a smaller workers' house. Staatsbosbeheer is exploring the possibility to redevelop the farm into a holiday accommodation, where people can wind down in a natural setting and take a break from everyday life. When Jan and I first visited the Biesbosch farm complex, it instantly felt as the perfect place to not only design a nature retreat, but also investigate what the *bezinnings*-landscape could and should be.

The first reason why the Amaliahoeve and its Biesbosch location are well suited for this project is the fact that, even though we identify its landscape as a nature park, it is the product of a complex collaboration of man and nature. It constitutes a highly intricate mix of wilderness, cultural and productive landscape and built structures, and is thus very suitable for an investigation into the synthesis between architecture, landscape and nature. In the site analysis that follows, I will elaborate on the complex history of the Biesbosch's many landscapes.

Secondly, the Biesbosch provides a wonderful, completely 'un-everyday' environment of timelessness, simplicity and nature. Its beauty and other-worldliness – although subjectively – inspire and move me every time I visit its islands and creeks. The Biesbosch is perfectly situated close to the Randstad and the Brabantse Stedenrij (two metropolitan regions in the west and south of the Netherlands) and its edges are easily accessible by car, bike and public transport. Once one reaches these edges, however, the pace lowers considerably and one is forced to continue the journey on foot or by small boats. Doing so, one enters a landscape that feels suddenly very far away from the world that one has just left behind, surrounded by water, high grasses and narrow creeks. This threshold and other-worldliness, in combination with the more traditional method of movement and the slow pace of the Biesbosch, provide an excellent setting for a place where guests can temporarily escape to.

Reader's guide

In this section, we will further investigate these qualities and the potential of introducing other aspects of a *bezinnings*-landscape here. Firstly, we will look into the geography and topography of the Biesbosch in general. We will then dive into the rich history of this landscape and the site, uncovering its many layers, after which an analysis of the spatial characteristics of the site and its surroundings follows. This concludes in a set of core values that together capture the story and opportunities of this remarkable island.

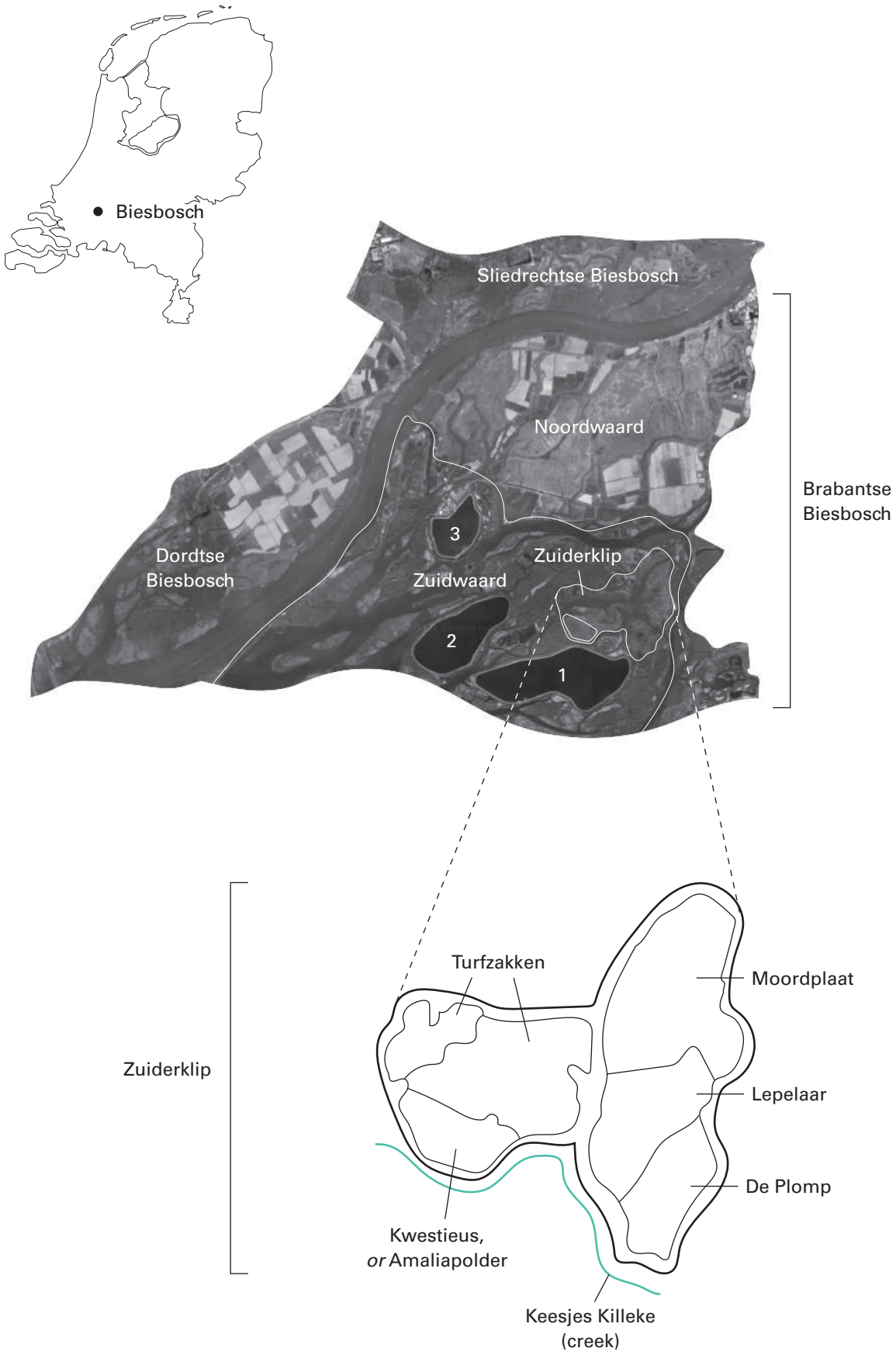


Fig. C5 – Biesbosch terminology

PART 1

Topography and geography

Names

The Biesbosch consists of three sections: the Sliedrechtse Biesbosch, north of the river Nieuwe Merwede, the Dordtse Biesbosch, west of the river, and the Brabantse Biesbosch, south-east of the river. The latter is divided into the Noordwaard and the Zuidwaard. In the Zuidwaard lies the Zuiderklip, a group of (former) polders: Kwestieus, Turfzakken (consisting of Grote Turfzak, Kleine Turfzak en Nieuwe Turfzak), Moordplaat, Lepelaar and De Plomp. Only the first is still a diked polder, the others were purposely flooded with the *doorbraak* ('breach') of the Zuiderklip. Polder Kwestieus is also known as Amaliapolder, named after the farm that was build on its southern edge in 1938. The creek that runs south of the farm is called Keesjes Killeke. In the Zuidwaard are three fresh water reservoirs, from east to west: De Gijster (1 in fig. C5), Honderd en Dertig (2) and Petrusplaat (3), named after the polders that were sacrificed.

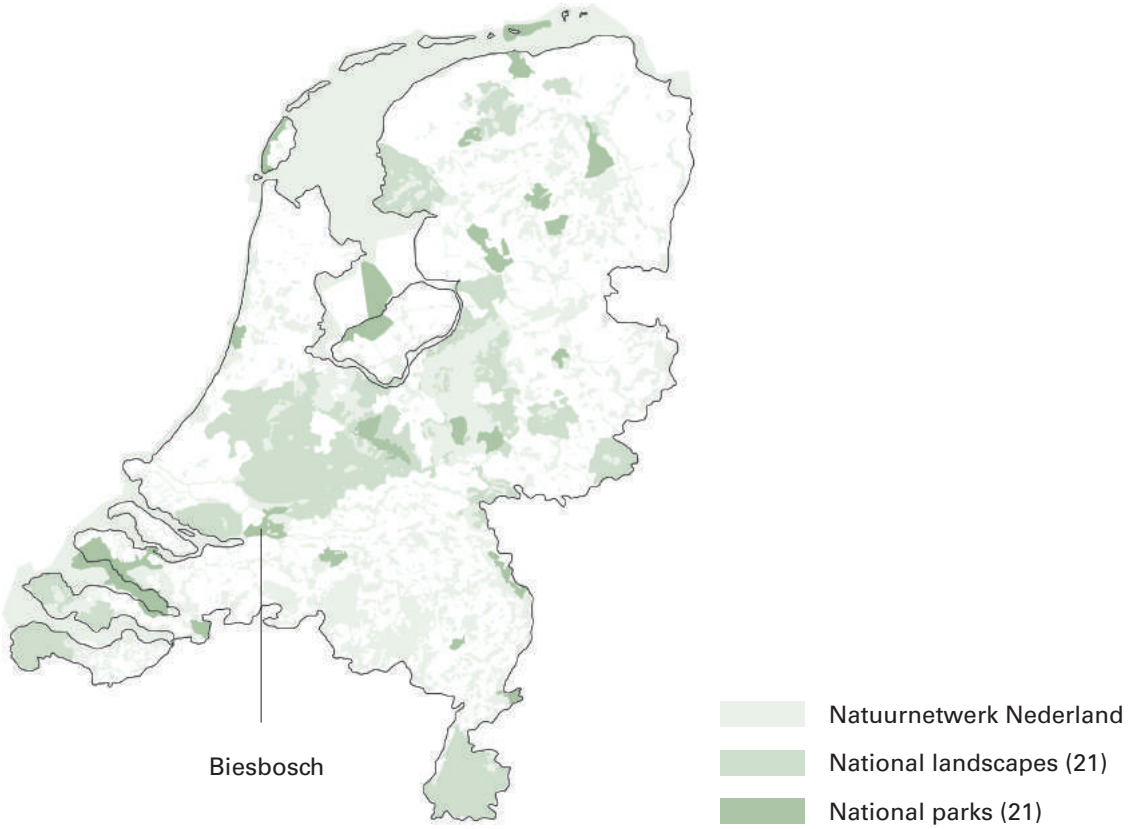


Fig. C6 – Map of ‘nature areas’ in the Netherlands (data source: atlasleefomgeving.nl)

Fig. C7 – Map of quiet areas in the Netherlands (data source: atlasleefomgeving.nl)

The Biesbosch is an important link of several Dutch and European nature networks (Rijksoverheid, n.d.):

- Natura 2000: an European network of protected nature areas, where certain animal species and their habitats are protected to maintain biodiversity.
- National parks: a park where nature is protected, recognised to be of national importance. Together, the 21 national parks of the Netherlands tell the story of Dutch nature.
- Natuurnetwerk Nederland (NNN): the main ecological structure of the Netherlands, a network of existing and future nature areas.
- Wetlands: the Netherlands has over 1.000.000 ha of wetlands, such as marshlands, peat-lands and moors.
- Close to the Biesbosch are two Nationale Landschappen ('national landscapes'), areas that are characterised by a unique combination of agriculture, nature and cultural history: Hoeksche Waard and Groene Hart. Additionally, the Biesbosch is a 'quiet area' (*stiltegebied*).

Fig. C8 – The Biesbosch's geography and location

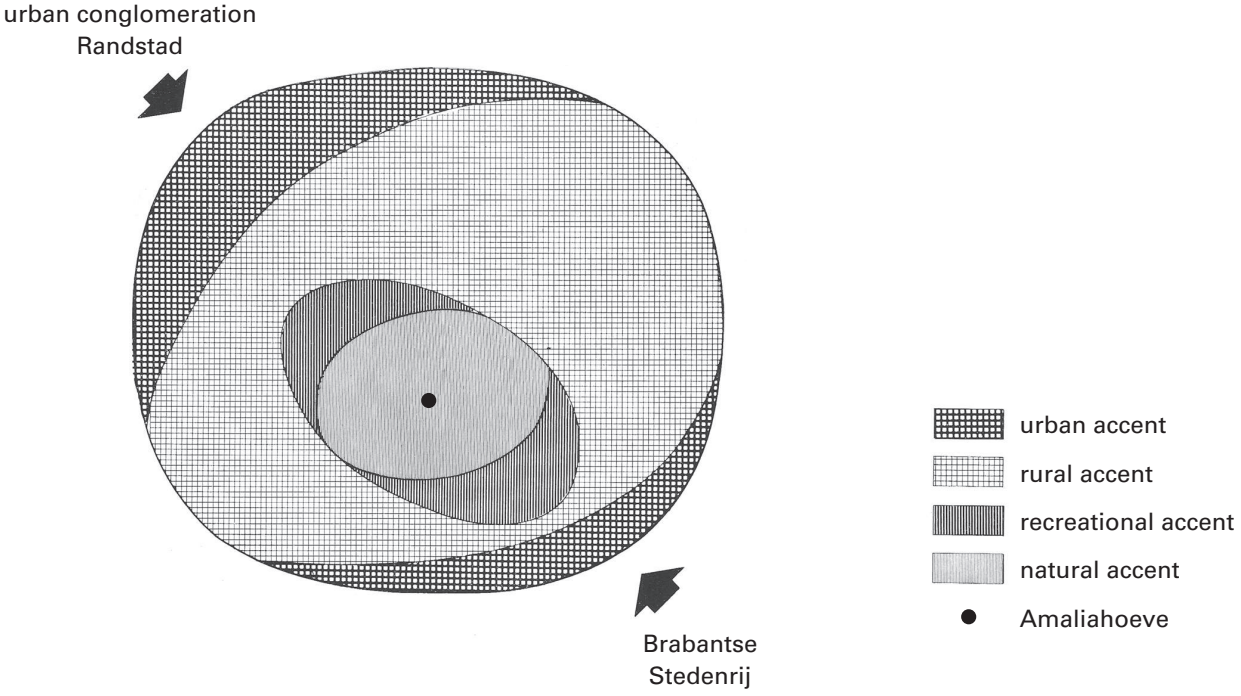


Fig. C9 – Accents of the Biesbosch

The Biesbosch lies on the edges of the urban conglomerations of the Randstad and the Brabantse Stedenrij, in between the cities of Dordrecht and Breda. In comparison to the expanding cities and their connecting infrastructure, the Biesbosch forms an enclave of wilderness. A world frozen in a different era, where nature and the seasons dominate and remnants of a hard but simpler former time provide refuge from modern life that roars and bellows on the other side of the Amer and the Nieuwe Merwede rivers.

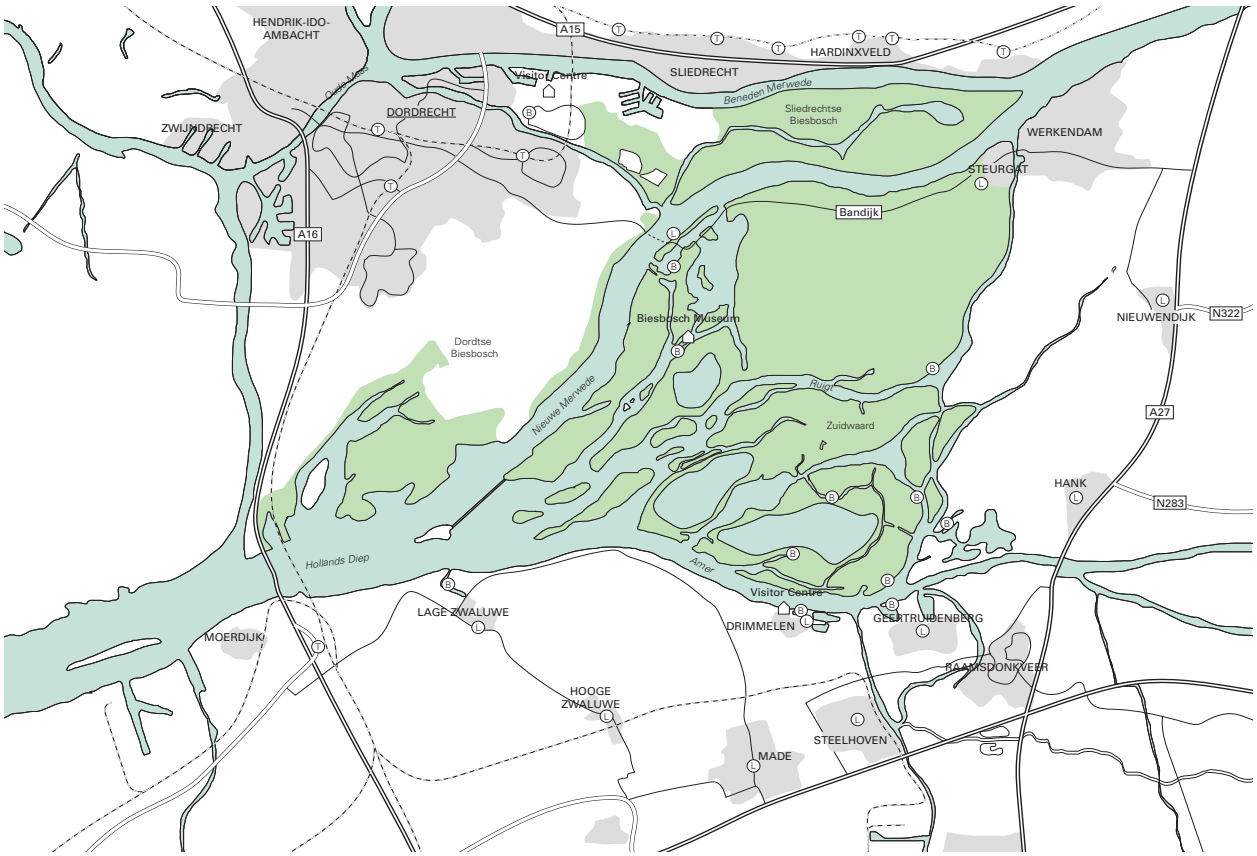


Fig. C10 – Map of the Biesbosch and surroundings

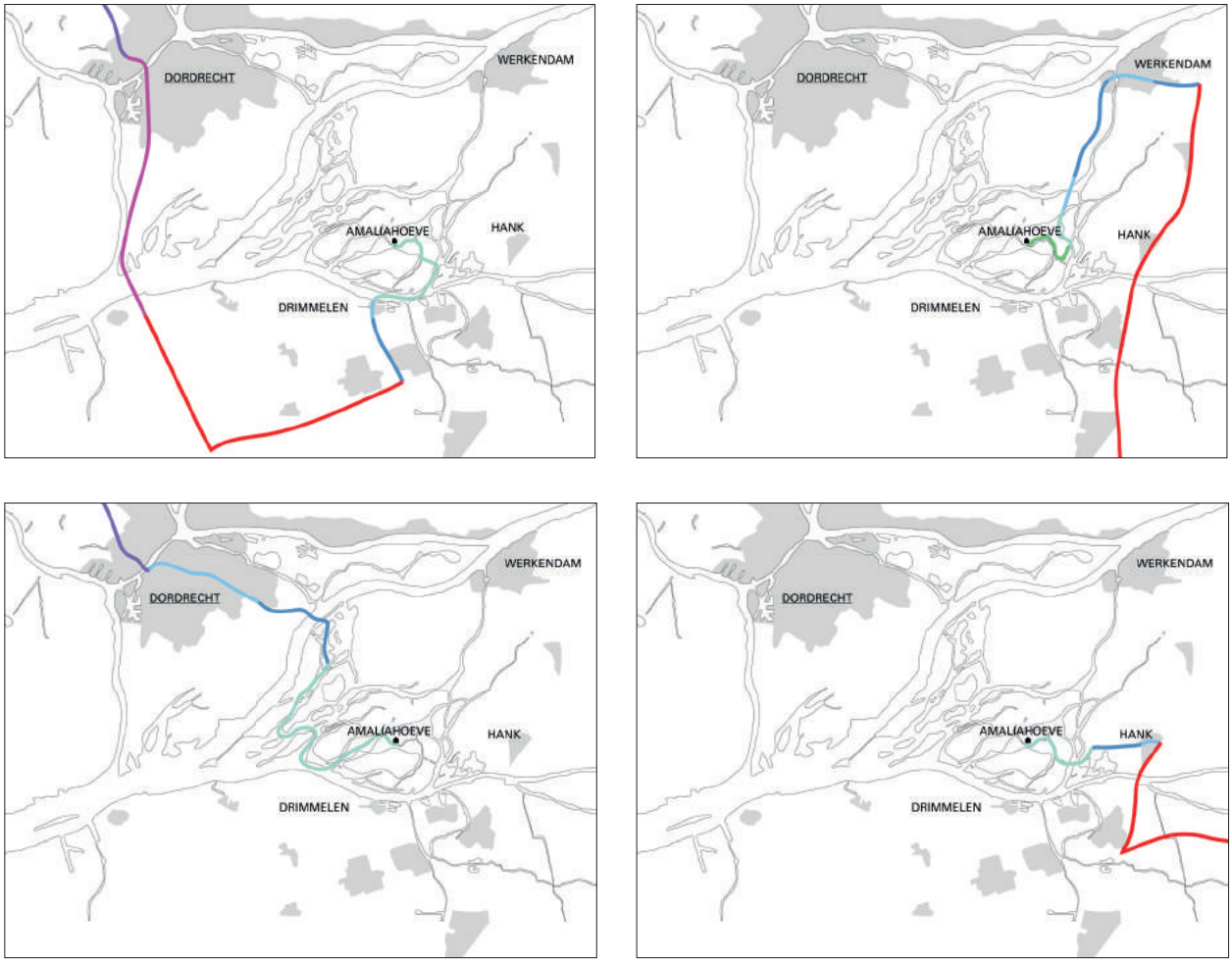


Fig. C11-14 – phased deceleration of route to Amaliahoeve. Clockwise: A16 > A59 > Drimmelen > Amaliahoeve; A27 > Werkendam > Lepelaar > Amaliahoeve (illustrated on the next page); A59 > A27 > Hank > Amaliahoeve; A16 > Dordrecht > Amaliahoeve.

Reaching one of the many Biesbosch islands requires various modes of transportation. The Amaliahoeve stands as one of the last reminders of a short-lived agricultural wealth in a now tranquil environment. From its position on a dike, it looks out over the polder and waterscape behind it. The farm can only be reached by private boat or kayak, there are no bridges or ferries. There are several places where buses stop and where one can transfer to boats in the marinas: nearby villages Drimmelen, Hank, Lage Zwaluwe and Werkendam and the Biesbosch Museum. There are no major car roads that cross the Brabantse Biesbosch, apart from the Bandijk, on the northern edge, only used for local traffic. The route to the Biesbosch is characterised by a strong gradual deceleration, that sets the scene for a pilgrimage-like journey and provides both a symbolic and an actual change in relation to one's everyday rhythm.

These photos track one of the routes to the Biesbosch (shown on image C12), starting on the motorway. It shows the gradual degree of pace, switching from car to boat and continuing the journey on foot.

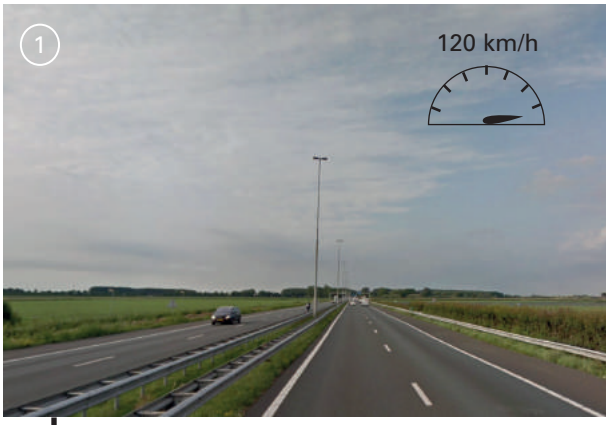


Fig. C15 – Driving over the A27.

Fig. C16 – Exiting near Werkendam and driving down the Dijkgraaf den Dekkerweg.

Fig. C17 – Slowing down to 50 km/h when passing Werkendam, crossing the bridge and entering the Biesbosch.

Fig. C18 – Leaving the main route through the Noordwaard (Bandijk) and driving southwards over the winding roads.

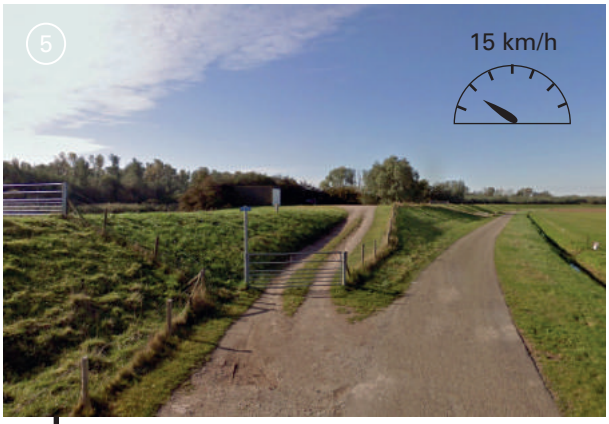


Fig. C19 – Arriving at the small Staatsbosbeheer marina at the Gat van Paulus, getting out of the car to open gate and driving up the dirt track.

Fig. C20 – Getting out of the car and switching to one of the boats.

Fig. C21 – Crossing the Reugt by boat and continuing down the rivers and creeks to the Zuiderklip.

Fig. C22 – Leaving the boat and walking over the dike.

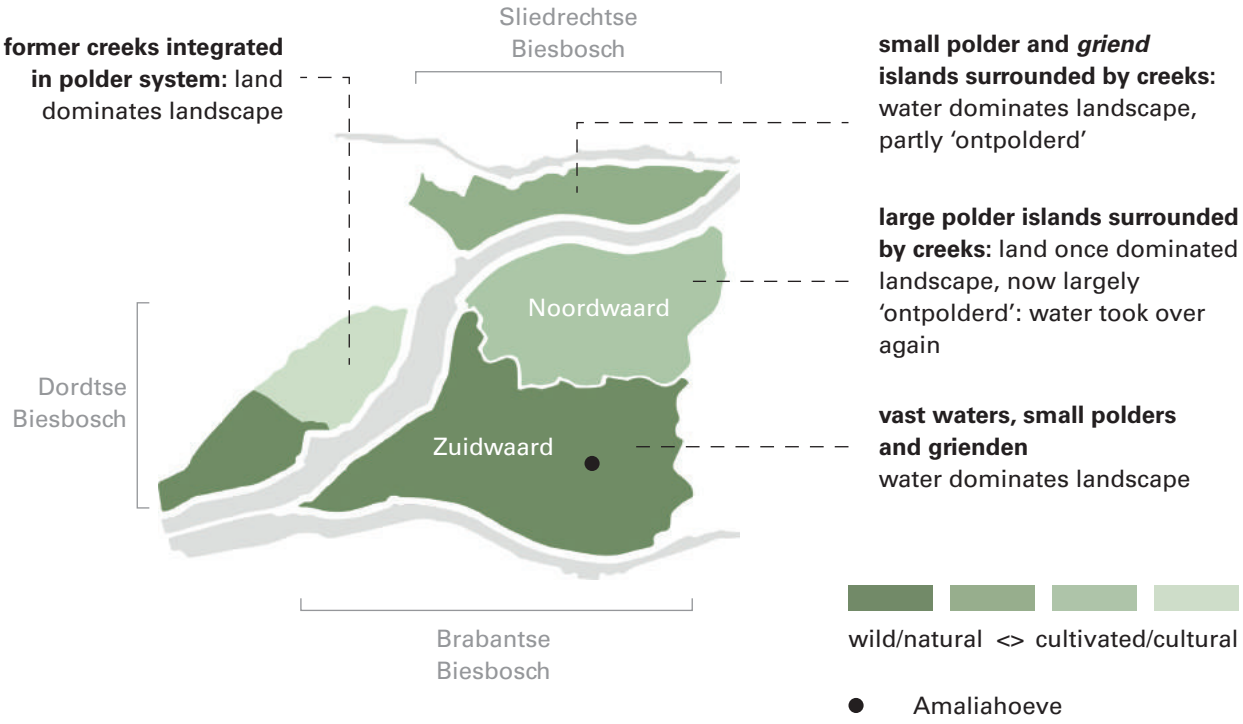


Fig. C23 – Scheme of the different landscapes of the Biesbosch, varying degrees of wildness and cultivation (based on Rijkswaterstaat, 1999)

Fig. C24-25 – Large polders of the Noordwaard (left) and Sliedrechtse Biesbosch partly given back to the river.

Fig. C26 – The partly cultivated, partly wild Dordtse Biesbosch

Fig. C27 – The water-dominated landscape of the Zuidwaard

As said, the Biesbosch is divided in the Dordrechtse, the Sliedrechtse and the Brabantse Biesbosch, of which the latter forms the largest and most remote section. The Brabantse Biesbosch is again subdivided into the Noord- and the Zuidwaard, of which the first used to be the more cultivated half: a landscape of conglomerated polder islands divided by twisty creeks. After the North Sea flood of 1953, the value of the Biesbosch as a flood zone was recognised. Water management policies were adapted and today the rivers and creeks are given more space in the Noordwaard. Polders are renounced, dikes are breeched and water is running free again, under the watchful eye of nature management. In the Zuidwaard, where water continues to dominate the landscape, a more varied landscape has prevailed, consisting of sand banks, vegetated with grass-like plants and shrubs, former osier (*wilgen*) plantations, flooded polders and meandering creeks. Here, man and natural phenomena have conjointly shaped and removed the land for many centuries and the landscape is dotted with signals of both wilderness and industrial cultivation. Growing numbers of wildlife (especially birds), feral growing osier trees and free-flowing creeks cross paths with motor boats, high voltage lines and large drink water basins. The Amercentrale, south of the river Amer, functions as an ever-present, eerily romantic backdrop. Most importantly, hectic city life is kept at a distance.

Fig. C28 – Biesbosch landscape on a misty morning

PART 2

History of the Biesbosch landscape and the Amaliahoeve

The Biesbosch presents an interesting example of the Dutch relationship with water and the complexity and blurriness of the nature-culture interrelation in general. This chapter summarises the development of this delta landscape since the end of the last ice age. It provides only an overview, but there are several existing sources that provide a more in-depth history of the Biesbosch, among which *Historische atlas van de Biesbosch* by Wim van Wijk (2012) and *Landschapsbiografie Nationaal Park NL Delta/Biesbosch-Haringvliet* by Lisa Timmerman for the Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed and Staatsbosbeheer (2018) have proved to be valuable sources.

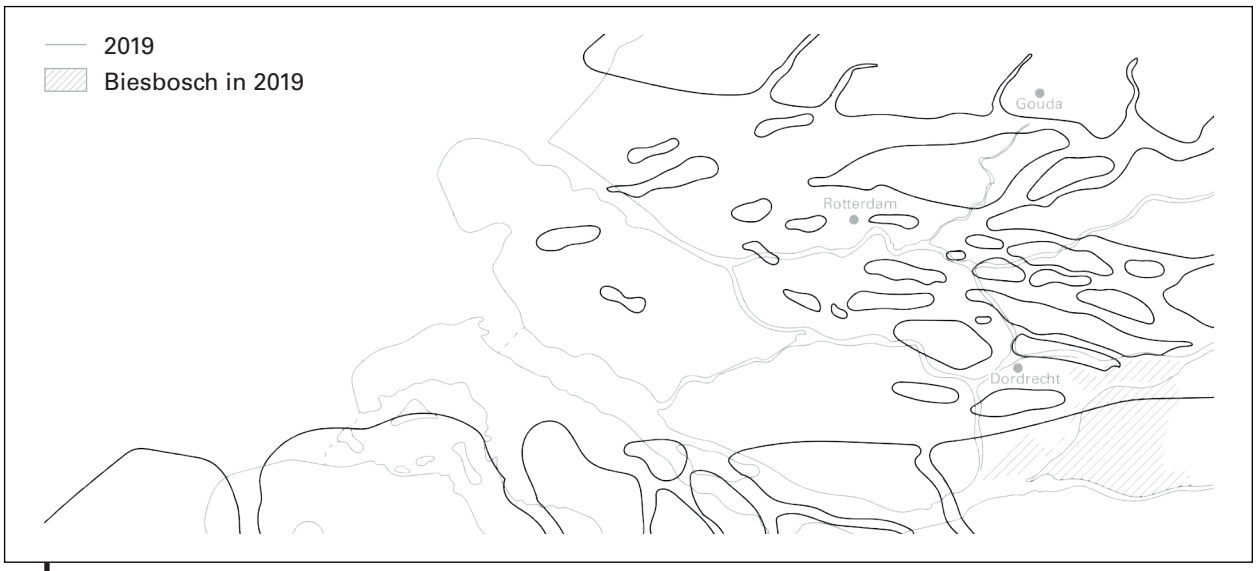


Fig. C29 – The south-west of the Netherlands in 5500 BC, a fertile landscape of *kreken* en *slikken*.

Fig. C30 – 1500 BC. The same area four centuries later. Almost the entire coastline has closed and the landscape became a swampy peat bog.

Fig. C31 – 800 AD. After the Roman colonisation, the former peat bogs had settled and reflooded. Only near the rivers, human settlement was still possible.

Fig. C32 – The *slikken* of Voorne (Dijkhuizen, n.d.)

Fig. C33 – The Dintelse *gorzen* (Natuurmonumenten, n.d.)

12.000 years ago, the southwest of what is now the Netherlands transformed from a tundra into a wide coastal river plane. The ice sheets melted, sea levels rose rapidly and the coastline advanced eastwards. What is now the Biesbosch flooded and became a tidal landscape of creeks, *slikken* (bare sand and clay banks that flood twice a day), *gorzen* (grass-covered banks that flood only in very high tides) and peat bog (*veenmoeras*), with a high diversity of flora and fauna. In this rich and versatile landscape, man settled on the highest river banks around 3.500 BC (Timmerman, 2018, 20-24).

Due to the on-going deposit of sand and clay by the sea, the coastline closed almost completely in the millennia that followed, allowing the peat bogs to expand. In the marshland landscape, dead plants formed layers on top of each other and decomposed only partly due to a lack of oxygen, resulting in layers of peat (De Wit, 21). The Biesbosch became a swampy delta. When, in the early iron age (800 to 500 BC), the sea's influence changed again, the coastline re-opened and new creeks were able to flow into the marshland. Rivers deposited more sediment, forming levees and, forced to change their course constantly, alluvial plains (De Wit, 21). The rivers and *kreken* increased the extraction of water from the surrounding land and made the peat bogs accessible. From their safe holdings on the higher river banks, farmers spread out into lower land. The cultivation of the peat lands was systematised and expanded by the Romans in the last century BC. Long, parallel trenches and dams were dug from the river banks into the bog and culvert systems (*duikers*) regulated water levels. The extraction of water and oxidation of the peat led to settlement (*krimp*) and subsidence (*inklinking*) of the soil. Judging by the still-present artificial mounds in the landscape, battling the sea became increasingly problematic and inhabitants of the region constructed small mounds (*terpen*) to stay dry (Timmerman, 2018, 27-31). By 350 AD, large sections of the marshlands had flooded again, ending the economic growth in the region and forcing the population back up the higher river banks.

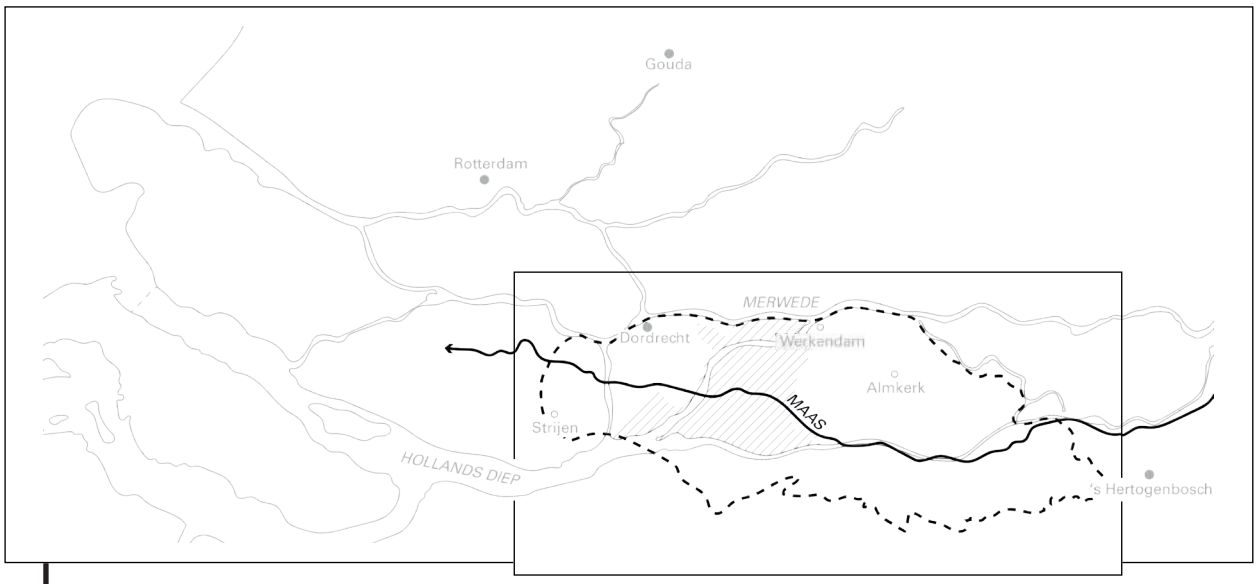


Fig. C34 – 1400 AD. The Grote Waard stretching from Strijen almost to 's-Hertogenbosch

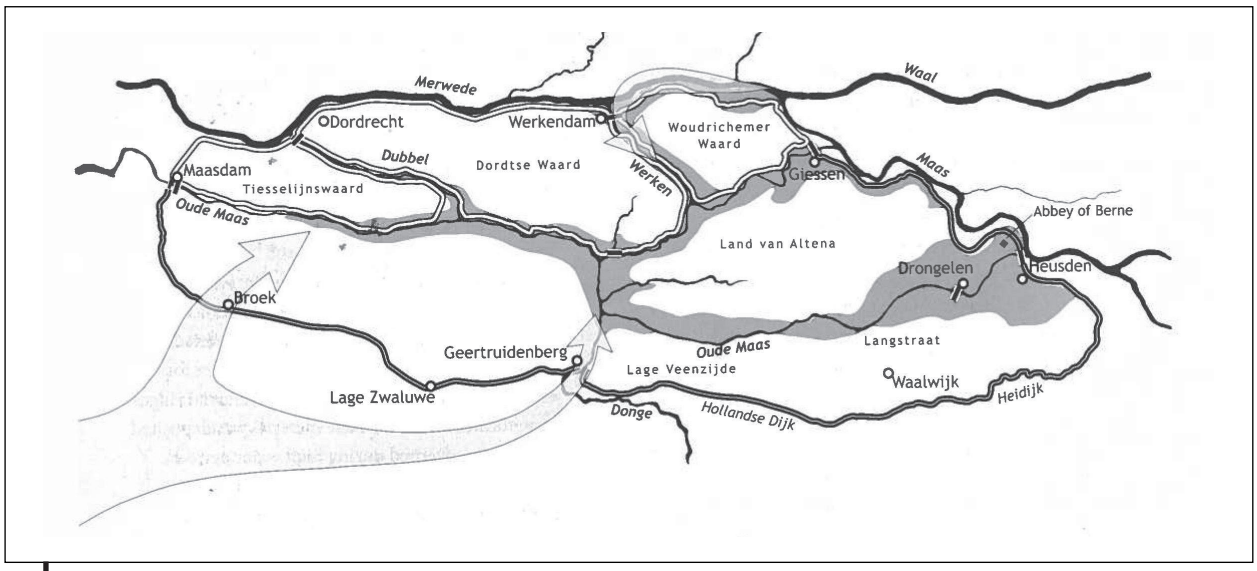


Fig. C35 – 1400 AD. The Grote Waard, consisting of several smaller *waarden* (De Wit, 2002, 32)

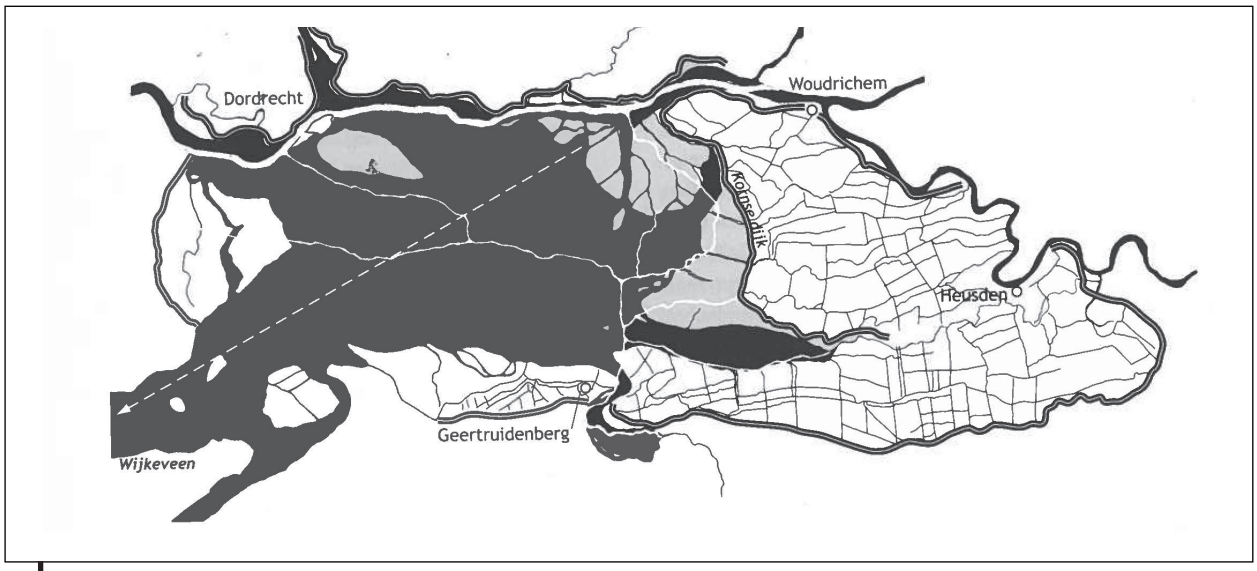


Fig. C36 – 1500 AD. After de St. Elisabethsvloed, de Grote Waard has become an inland sea (De Wit, 2002, 34)

SECOND CULTIVATION WAVE: DE GROTE WAARD

350 – 1421

The wild bog lands were systematically cultivated again from the eighth century onwards, first by the Franks and later by the bishop of Utrecht. Society and taxes were organised in a feudal system (*hofstelsel*) and, like in the Roman era, long ditches were dug from the higher river banks to drain the marsh. Soil settlement forced farmers to extend their ditches further into the back country. Villages started to construct short dikes to protect their farm land from high river tides. By the twelfth century, the ground level had sunk dangerously low and the farmers had to collaborate, connecting their dikes and creating one large, water management entity: Grote Waard. This *waard* – a polder enclosed entirely by rivers – was exceptionally large for its time, almost twice as vast at the much younger Haarlemmermeer today. Several dams were built in the rivers that ran through the Waard to control the water levels of the polder and joining several smaller *waarden* together. First in the Werken and the Eem, later in the Maas, transforming a major and threatening river into the Waard's main drainage channel. The region thrived on these versatile and fertile lands and the Waard became – with Dordrecht as its exclusive trading city – one of the main production fields of the county Holland, with grain and peat as the main export products (Timmerman, 2018, 35-41).

In the fourteenth century, the continuing fight against the water grew troublesome. The board that controlled water management in the Waard – which still consisted of several shires – was unable to reach agreement on several issues. Meanwhile the ground level continued to lower. Dikes breached at several places, climaxing in the St. Elisabeth Flood (actually multiple floods) in 1421 and 1422. Almost the entire region flooded and between 8.000 and 20.000 of its inhabitants were affected. Dordrecht became a walled island in an inland sea, stretching from Strijen in the west to Almkerk in the east. Only the occasional church tower poked through the water surface (Wijk, 2012, 13-15; Timmerma, 2018, 42-43). The administration of the Grote Waard was unable to restore and reconstruct the polder collectively.

Fig. C37 – This altarpiece, dedicated to St. Elisabeth by the inhabitants of Wieldrecht, commemorates the catastrophic flood of 1421. 'De Sint-Elisabethsvloed, Meester van de Heilige Elisabeth-Panelen', c. 1490 – ca. 1495, oil on panel, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

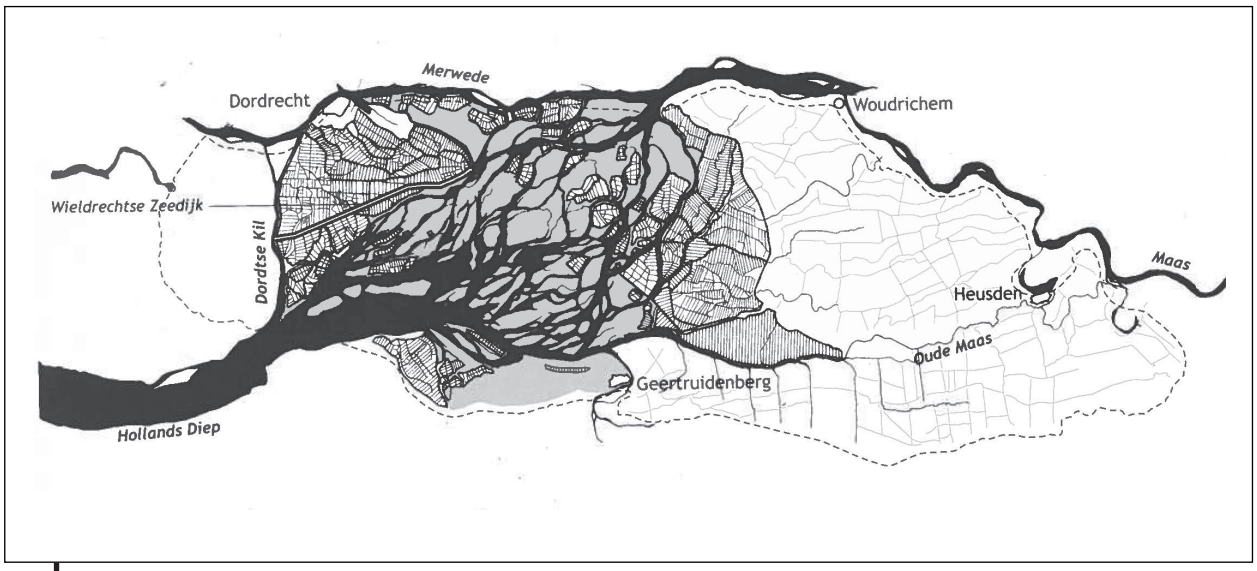


Fig. C38 – 1700 AD. The inland sea is slowly but surely reclaimed. (De Wit, 2002, p.30)

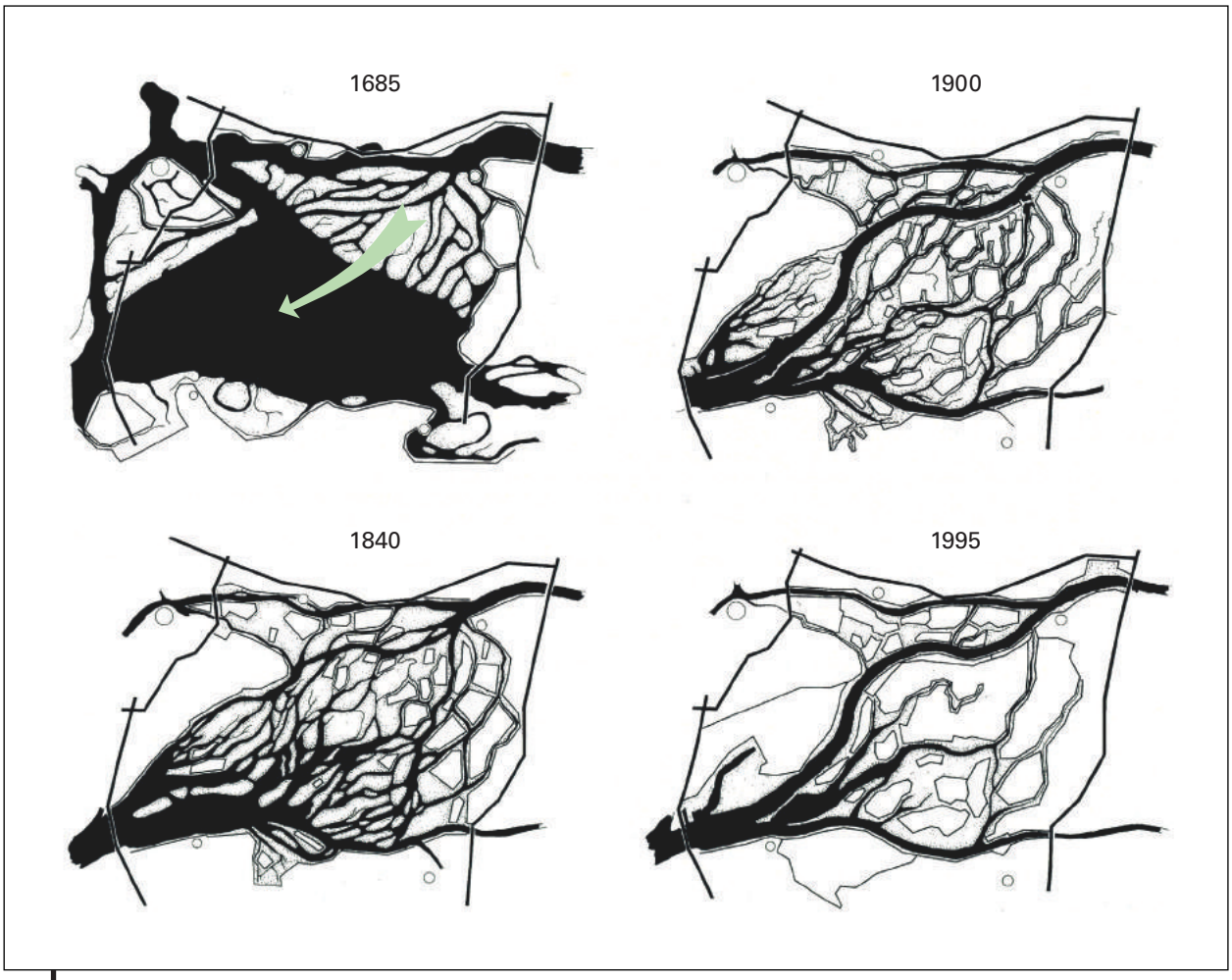


Fig. C39 – Sedimentation and cultivation of the inland sea after the St. Elisabethsvloed, a partly natural, partly cultural transition moving from the northeast to the southwest. (Rijkswaterstaat, 1999, p. 23)

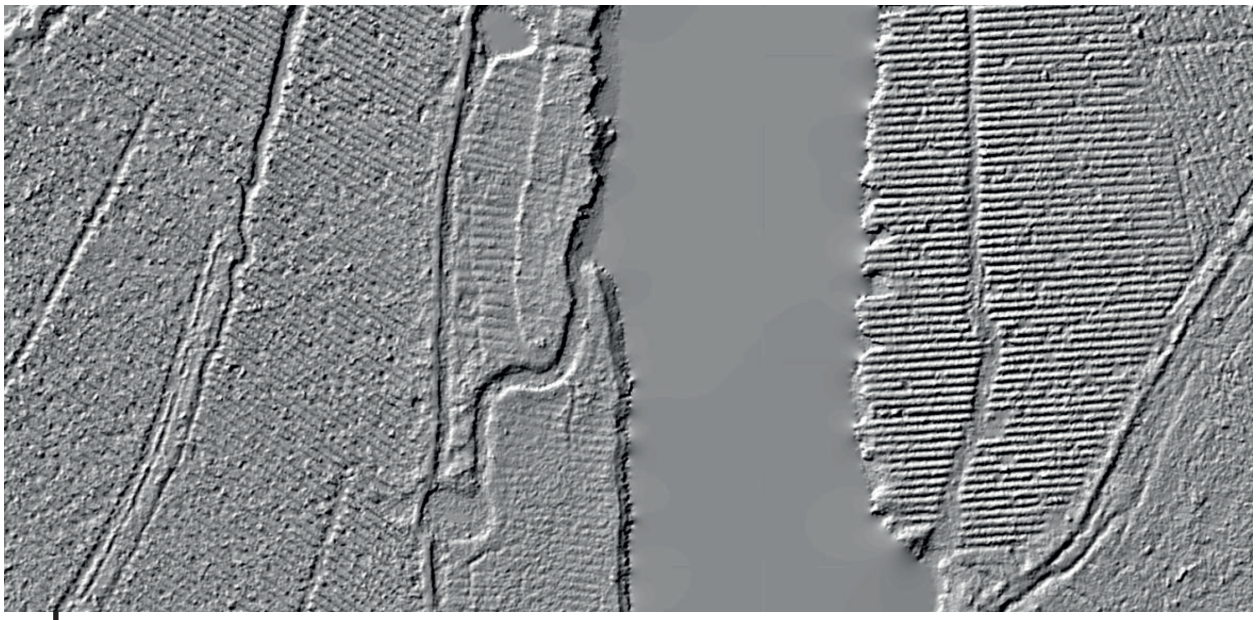


Fig. C40 – Relief map of griend landscapes in the Biesbosch. The island on the left, Benedenste Jannezand, is accessible on foot from the Amaliapolder (Algemeen Hoogtebestand Nederland, n.d.)

After the St. Elisabeth Flood, the river courses of the Maas and Merwede changed and now flowed out into the Hollandsch Diep and Haringvliet, changing the drainage flow direction from north-westwards to south-westwards. The remaining peat was swept of and replaced by a thick clay layer (De Wit, 25).

Not the entire Waard had flooded. The Kornse Dijk had managed to hold back the water and was repaired (see fig. C36). On the other side, protected from the strong currents of the new river courses running north and south, sedimentation of sand and clay began. Over the three to four centuries that followed, the inland sea was, by a combination of human intervention and natural sedimentation, slowly reclaimed (see fig. C38). On the lower *gorzen* grew *biezen*, a grass-like plant that farmers and nearby villagers harvested to make mats and chair seats. Once the *biezengorzen* had silted up high enough, *riet* (reed) would emerge, which could be used for roofing and dike construction. When the *rietgorzen* had become even higher, osier trees started to settle and the *gorzen* were enclosed by ramparts and ditches that managed water levels and planted with osiers in straight lines. On relief maps, we can still see the contours of these ditches (see fig. C40). This partly natural, partly cultural process of turning *slikken* into so-called *wilgengrienden* (osier plantations) took at least one hundred years, but the *killen* changed their course constantly, so the landscape was highly dynamic. After fifty to sixty years, the *grienden* were high and dry enough to be cultivated as farm land (Suijlekom, 2001, 3). The first polders were constructed in the east, near the Kornse Dijk, and in the north, where the river Merwede was separated from the inland sea by islands and remnants of dikes. Over the following centuries, the reclaiming of land continued south-eastwards. (Wijk, 2012, 53-55, 62-63). By 1850, large sections of land had re-emerged from the water, forming a fine network of creeks with fresh water coming in from the rivers, but still influenced by the tides of the sea. This created a unique fresh water tidal system (*zoetwatergetijdengebied*) (Timmerman, 2018, 45).

Fig. C41 – Map of the flooded Grote Waard in 1560, made by Pieter Sluyter, A: Dordrecht, B: Werkendam, C: river Merwede, D: Kornse Dijk, E: Dussen, F: Geertruidenberg. The faint lines and notes crossing the inland sea show the attempt of Sluyter's party to map the former outlines of the Maas. (Nationaal Archief, 4. VTH Hingman nr 1895a)

Fig. C42 – Military map made in approximately 1840. A large section of the former Waard has been recovered. The west side, near Dordrecht (now the Dordtse Biesbosch), has been fully impoldered, and on the north and south side of the river Merwede (marked here as "Groote Hel" and "West Kil") are smaller polders as well (now the Sliedrechtse Biesbosch). The majority of the landscape at the heart of the former Waard still consists of *slikken* (soft yellow), *gorzen* (green), *grienden* (grey) and creeks. A: Dordrecht, B: river Merwede, C: plateau that would become Amaliapolder, E: Drimmelen, F: river Amer. (Nationaal Archief, 4.TOPO 8)

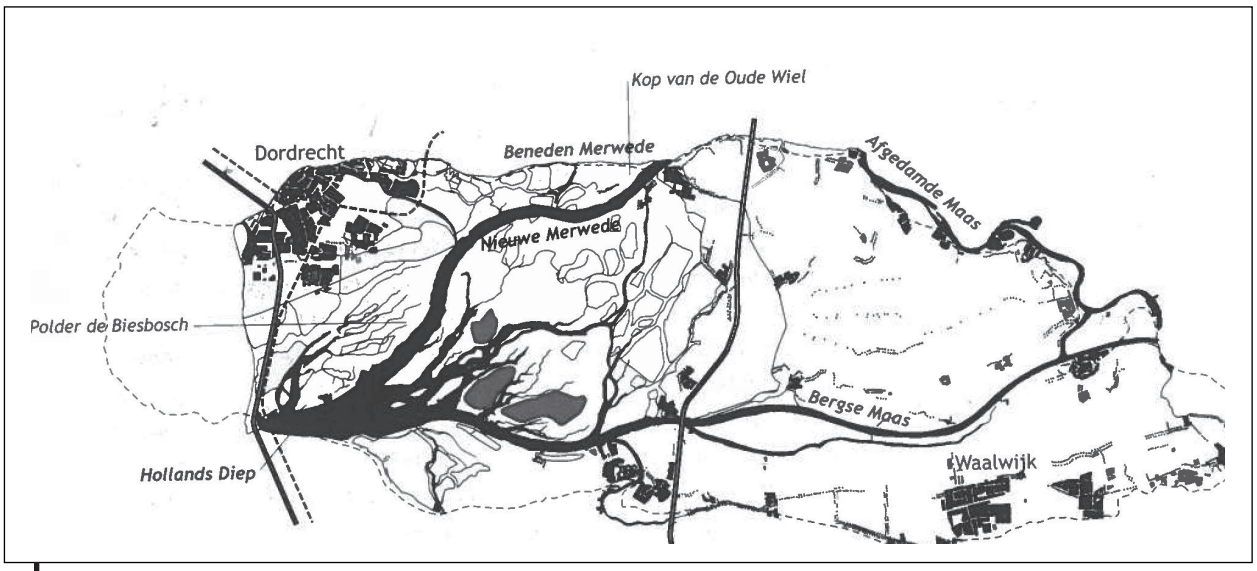


Fig. C43 – 2000. The former Grote Waard today, with the Biesbosch and its new water reservoirs in the centre (De Wit, 2002, p. 32)

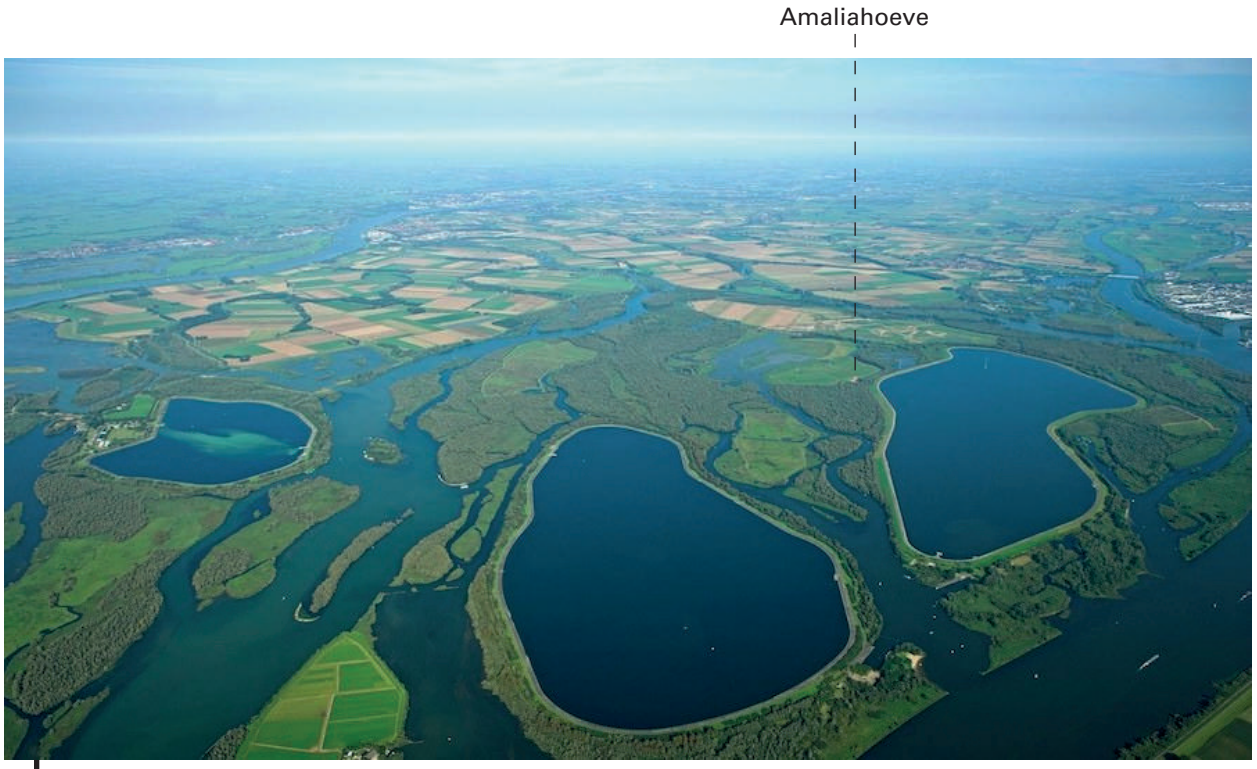


Fig. C44 – The three water reservoirs in the Biesbosch, from left to right Petrusplaat, Honderd en Dertig and De Gijster. Zuiderklip, the ensemble of polders surrounding the Amaliahoeve was planned to become the fourth reservoir, but this turned out not to be necessary, leaving the Amaliahoeve as one of very few surviving farms of the Zuidwaard (Evides Waterbedrijf, n.d.)

New rivers

Even though the Biesbosch was increasingly cultivated, water continued to be troublesome. Due to the increase of land in the Biesbosch, the rivers lost their strong currents, increasing sediment of sand and clay and clogging creeks and river arms. High summer tides and ice formation in winter caused problems for the dikes and Rotterdam and Dordrecht were often difficult to reach. In 1818, civil engineer Jan Blanken proposed to expand one of the bigger creeks into a 21 km long, 300-600 m wide channel and to dam of the other creeks (Wijk, 2012, 144-147; Timmerman, 2018, 96). The Nieuwe Merwede would transport enough water to erode its own river bed and keep this important route over water accessible.

In 1904, a similarly ambitious project was completed. In the previous century, the Maas had caused problems further inland. The river discharged in the Rijn, which was unable to drain the vast quantities of water and as a result, the Maas flooded regularly. In order to relief dikes and areas up-stream, a new connection was made between the Maas and river Amer, ending in the Hollandsch Diep (Wijk, 2012, 148-149).

New dikes

Around 1950, water management engineers were planning to dike the entire Brabantse Biesbosch, transforming the then fragmented delta landscape into one large polder. The main goal was to socio-economically improve the conveniently located but somewhat feral region. In the 1890s, a start had already been made with the construction of the river Nieuwe Merwede and its southern dike from Werkendam to the meeting point of the new river and the Amer. By reinforcing this dike and extending it to Hank in the east the circle could be closed. Plans were still being made when, in 1953, the North Sea flood (*Waternoodsramp*) caused devastation near the coast and along the rivers. The Biesbosch turned out to be a highly valuable flood plain (Timmerman, 2018, 99-100).

New dams

In the night of 31 January 1953, a combination of spring tide and strong wind forced water into the southwest of the Netherlands, flooding a region of up to 150.000 ha, including the entire Biesbosch. Almost 2.000 lives were lost and the damage to infrastructure and buildings was immense. The shock led to drastic measures: the tidal inlets in the provinces of Zeeland and Zuid-Holland would be dammed off with the Deltawerken. This meant that, for the first time since de Grote Waard, the Brabantse Biesbosch was no longer connected with the sea and its tides. The difference between high and low tide diminished from 2,0 to 0,3 meters. New plants emerged, the *grienden* grew wild and water quality stagnated. Exploitation of *biezen*, reed and osiers – which relied on the tidal system – was no longer worthwhile (Timmerman, 2018, 100-102).

Water for the city

The last major human intervention in the Biesbosch was completed in 1974. Three former polders were transformed into large drinking water basins for the region of Dordrecht and Rotterdam. In these 600 ha of reservoirs, water from the river Maas is pre-cleaned through natural processes (Wijk, 2012, 194-195).

Fig. C45 – Aerial image of a flood zone in the former Noordwaard. On the front the land art piece Wassende Maan by Paul de Kort, a circular pattern of dikes and ditches that makes the tidal difference visible (Rijkswaterstaat, 2012)

Fig. C46 – A new house in de Noordwaard built on a new artificial mound (Ruud Morijn, 2016)

Already during the construction of the Deltawerken, it became apparent that these obstructions had a major impact on the ecological diversity of the delta behind them, shutting out the tides and disconnecting life in the rivers from the sea. Several reports, among which Rijkswaterstaat's 'Omgaan met water' en Gelderse Milieufederatie's 'Plan Ooievaar', pleaded for a more nature-friendly and sustainable approach in water management. When water levels in the rivers ran threateningly high and entire areas had to be evacuated in 1995, the decision was made: the rivers needed more space. As part of the policy plan 'Ruimte voor de rivier', Rijkswaterstaat took several measures: moving dikes away from the rivers, lowering the summer dikes and flood plains and removing obstacles such as buildings and hedges (Timmerman, 2018, 112-119). The Biesbosch would be one of the places where the rivers could run relatively free and became a National Park in 1994. In 2010, the Noordwaard was "un-poldered": dikes were lowered and houses were put on mounds (terpen), allowing the water to run in during the winter months and relieving the pressure on dikes elsewhere. In this new wilderness, aquatic birds (spoonbills, herons, cormorants, geese), raptors (white-tailed eagles, osprey and peregrine) and fish thrived. Biezen, reed and osier trees have grown wild and the polders and dikes are maintained by grazing Highland cattle, Koniks, and water buffaloes. In the Zuidwaard, only one farm is still active, the Biesboschhoeve on De Vischplaat.

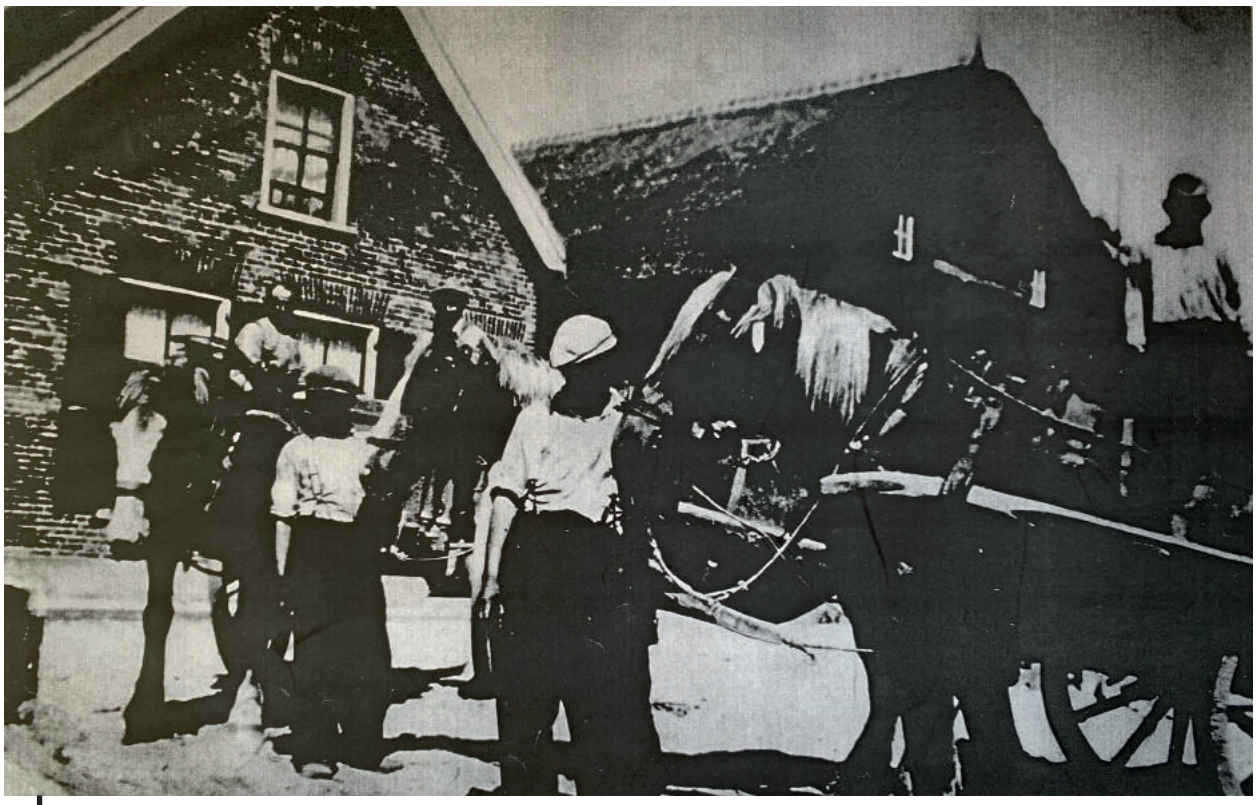


Fig. C47 – The Amaliahoeve before Carlier's redevelopment, most likely around the 1920s. On the left is the workers' dwelling that would later be painted white. On the right the barn's predecessor, orientated southwards (and thus perpendicular to the orientation of the later barn) (Hennie Killner's personal archive, original source unknown)

Fig. C48 – A picture taken from the same vantage point as the image above in 2019

The sand bank that would become the polder Kwestieus most probably surfaced from the post-flood inland sea at the end of the eighteenth century, as it first appears on a map made in 1804 (Wijk, 2012, 180-181). Most of the marshy land was owned by the Prince of Orange and later King Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. The latter's brother, Emporer Napoleon, sold the plateaus and *gorzen* to various people in 1813. Several farmers and landowners claimed a set of six semi-cultivated islands, resulting in dispute and thus the names Krakeelplaat, Twistplaat or 'Questieuze' – the plateau that would later become the Amaliapolder (Suijlekom, 2001, 3-5).

We know from cadestral maps that in 1832, the Krakeelplaat was still functioning as a *biezengors*, and that it was impoldered in 1874. The polder flooded several times between 1897 and 1916. In 1912, the then-owner Jonkheer De Grez built a house, barn and *keet* (workers' shed) on the Krakeelplaat. In the 1930s, it came to the attention of a rich Belgian banker, Hector Leon Carlier, that the Dutch government was planning to dike the entire Biesbosch and turn it into profitable and industrialised farm land. On 23 October 1937, Carlier – supposodely registered as 'Natuur- en maatschappijbeheerder' (which means something like Manager or Custodian of Nature and Society) bought almost 450 ha of land in the Biesbosch, including Polder Kwestieus, the neighbouring Middelveld, Mokenpolder and Nieuwe Turfzak (Suijlekom, 2001, 5-6). Hector Carlier was on a mission to make profit, for which he planned to construct a highly modern new infrastructure and built a major and monumental farm in the middle of his land. On Middelveld, he expanded the farm built there by Jonkheer De Grez, naming it after his daughter Marie-Antoinette. On Mokenpolder, he expanded an existing farm and named it Hoeve Ferdinand after his son. On Polder Kwestieus, he demolished the barn and workers' shed of De Grez and appointed architect L. Bakkers from Werkendam to design a new farm house. The spectacularly grand new barn – out of charachter compared to other farms in the region – was designed by a more prestigious architect, Fransiscus Bernardus Sturm, who was also responsible for Carlier's new farm buildings on Middelveld and Mokenpolder. The fact that Carlier kept the former farmer's family house and 'downgraded' it into a worker's dwelling and the new villa that he built for his farmer tenant give an impression of the size and monumentality of the project that he was embarking on. The size of the barn – much to large for the small Amaliapolder – came forth from his centralised plan: once the Biesbosch was fully diked, it would become one large polder, and Carlier could easily collect its produce at one central point from where it could be exported in one go (Regionaal Archief Tilburg (RAT), entry 2352, inv. no. 1042, 1045, 1046).

Carlier leased the Amaliapolder to the Brooijmans family, who would work the land for over 30 years. The Biesbosch was never diked, and the plans stopped after the flood in 1953. Carlier's big plans would never come out as he intentioned them, but he wouldn't have known because he supposedly killed himself after World War II because he was accused of financially collaborating with the nazis. In 1969, NV Waterwinningbedrijf 'Brabantse Biesbosch' had purchased several large polders, including Carlier's Polder Moken, Middelveld and Polder Kwestieus (by then often called Amaliapolder). The farms on the first two (Hoeve Ferdinand and Marie- Antoinette) were demolished and the polders were given up for the second basin, De Gijster. A fourth basin was planned for the Zuiderklip, which included Amaliapolder, but this did not go through, saving the Amaliapolder from demolition. In 1999, ownership of the Polder and its farm were transferred to Staatsbosbeheer (Suijlekom, 2001, 13).

Fig. C49 – Hector Carlier and wife Amalia (Heemkundige Kring Essen, n.d.)

Fig. C50 – Hector Carlier (left) as a member of the Belgian mission in New York. (Underwood & Underwood, 1917)

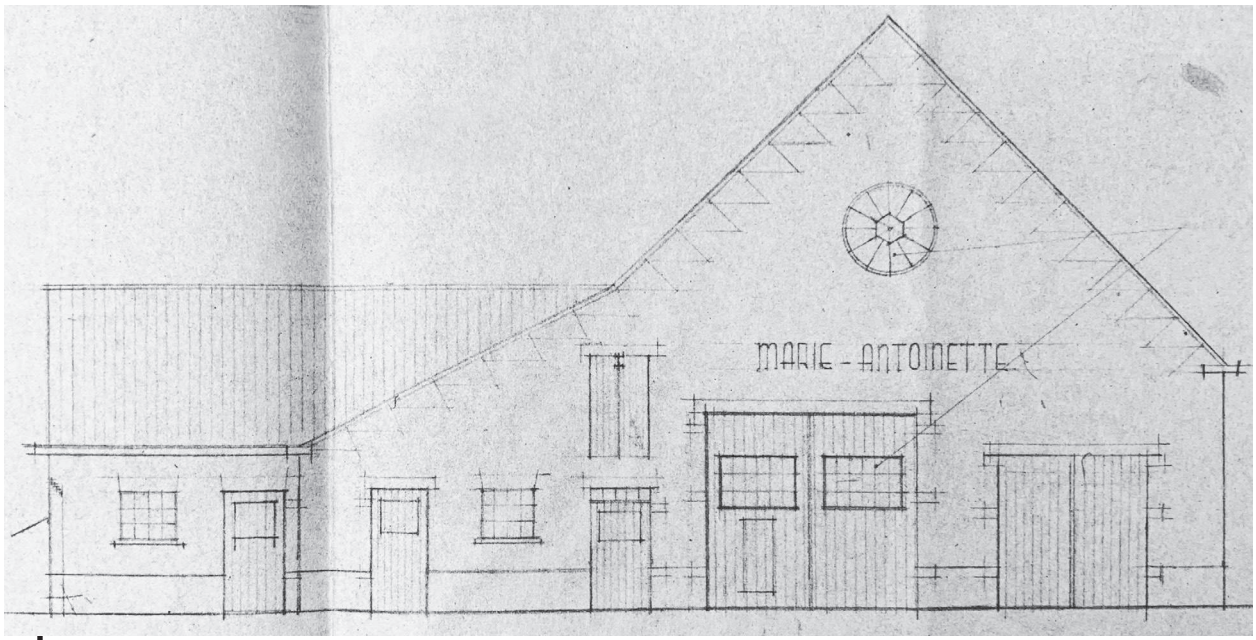


Fig. C51 – Drawing of the front facade of the Marie-Antoinettehoeve. Carlier extended and renamed an existing barn on Middelveld in 1939. (Regionaal Archief Tilburg 2352, inv. no. 1045/2033)

Fig. C52 – *griendwerkers* next to their worker's shed (*keet*) (Huib den Tuinder, in: Van der Merwe-Wouters, 2014, 32)

Fig. C53 – *griendwerkers* sleeping in their *keet* (Huib den Tuinder, in: Van der Merwe-Wouters, 2014, 56)

‘Hier leerde ik de taal van ‘t water kennen
Soms rustig stromend, soms met donderend geweld
Hier leerde men mij aan Uw modder wennen
Hier heb ik als jongen ‘t eerste hout geveld
...
Hier voelde ik mij rijker dan een koning
Door U gebonden, maar toch heerlijk vrij
Al had ik maar een schaam’le keet als woning
Met riet als slaapplaats en een vloer van klei’

– excerpt from ‘Oh stukje land geklemd tussen de rivieren’, Bas van der Stelt

Life in the Biesbosch was tough. In summer, *biezen* and reed workers would cover their faces with mud to protect themselves from mosquitoes and other insects (Timmerman, 2018, 46). In winter, they would work in bitter cold on the wet *grienden*, cutting osier branches for a low salary. They would camp out for six days a week in small, overcrowded wooden and reed-covered sheds (*keten*) or arks in poor living conditions. The Woningwet of 1901 focussed on the living conditions of factory workers in the city and did not cover the sheds and arks in the marshlands of the Biesbosch (Suijlekom, 2001, 8). Only in 1924, the living conditions of the Biesbosch workers were regulated in the Ketenbesluit.

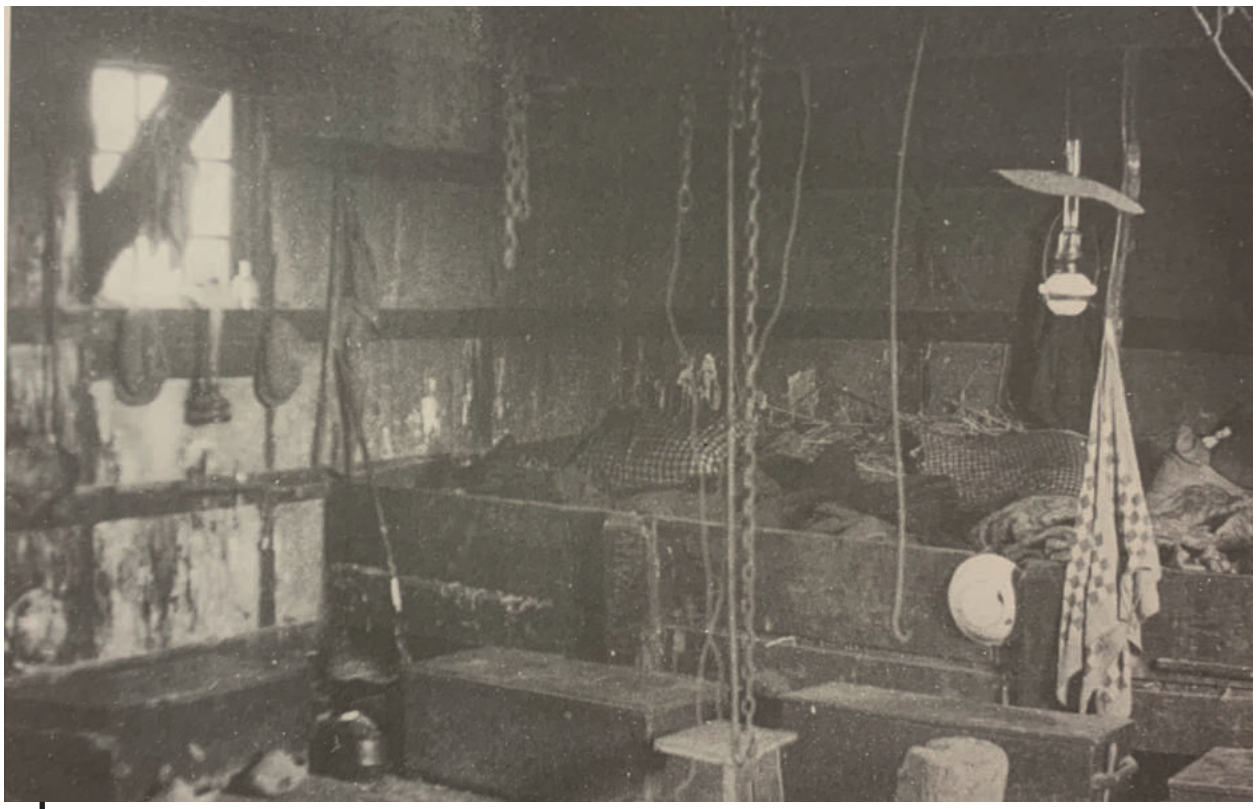


Fig. C54 – Interior of a worker's cottage after the implementation of the Ketenbesluit. The wooden boxes in the foreground served as storage units, seats and tables (Haan, 2002, 102)

Fig. C55 – Every night, the workers boiled potatoes over the open fire (Haan, 2002, 54)

Fig. C56 – Reed worker standing knee-deep in the wetland (Haan, Jaquet & Jeveren, 2003, p. 42)

Fig. C57 – Duck decoy workers (Haan, Jaquet & Jeveren, 2003, p. 29)

In her book *Leven en overleven in de Biesbosch* (2014), Geke van der Merwe-Wouters, interviews those who had to brave the cold and the wet of the Biesbosch as *griendwerkers* and farmers. Their stories give an insight into the severe hardship of Biesbosch life just over seventy years ago.

Janus Visser (1910-?) worked as a *griendwerker* on polder De Dood: *'Op een kille novemberdag in 1993 doet Janus Visser uit Werkendam aan mij zijn verhaal,'* Van der Merwe-Wouters writes. *'Hij praat niet graag over de ellende in de griend. Boosheid en emotie klinken door in zijn stem. (...) 'Als broekie moest ik dus al mee,' steekt Visser van wal. 'Tot mijn zestiende verdiende ik geen cent. Een keihard leven. Alleen de sterksten overleefden. De zwakkeren gingen dood. Wie onderuitging, werd door zijn kameraden ziek of dood naar huis geroeid. (...) Je sliep in een keet met anderen of in je eentje. Ratten als gezelschap. Zat je te eten, dan gooide je een stuk brood of aardappel naar ze toe. (...) Of we last van de kou hadden?' Met verbaasde blik: 'Je mocht geen kou hebben. Je werd zo hard als een spijker."* (Van der Merwe-Wouters, 2014,55)

Toon van Drunen (1914-2005), the oldest son of nine children of the farmer tenant on the Bloemplaat: '*In 1927 – Toontje is dan dertien – komt hij in dienst van zijn vaders broodheren. Voor tachtig centen per week moet hij zich elf uur per dag in het zweet werken. Ploegen, eggen en zaaien met twee werkpaarden. 's Winters melken, acht werkpaarden en jongvee verzorgen. (...) 'Je moest altijd door. 's Zomers diende ik al om vijf uur op te staan. (...) Ik mocht niet onderdoen voor de knechten, integendeel, ik moest hen tot een voorbeeld zijn en werd dus niet ontzien.' (...) Emotioneel aangedaan, struikelend over zijn woorden, vertelt hij over de nachten die hij als kind tussen volwassen kerels doorbracht. 'In de zomer had vader zes Werkendammers onder zich. Zij overnachtten in de keten. Omdat ons huisje veel te klein was, moest ik als oudste in een van de keten slapen.' Er valt nu een langere stilte. Laat me maar even, zeggen zijn ogen.'* (Van der Merwe-Wouters, 2014, 56).

Dries Hakkers, boer van het Bergsche Veld, emphasises that the nostalgic, melancholic view of the new Biesbosch visitors (tourists) is miles removed from that of the former labourers: '*Overigens wel een vreemde zaak, dat buitenstaanders die niet in de Biesbosch wonen, werken of er hoogstens bij gunstig weer een kijkje komen nemen, de klok willen terugdraaien. De landbouwer hier denkt daar anders over. Bij hem geen nostalgie of hang naar het verleden.'* (Van der Merwe-Wouters, 2014, 34)

Fig. C58 – The Amaliahoeve seen from the back. The piggery annex is now removed. (Hennie Killner's personal archive, original source unknown)

Fig. C59 – Brick shed for *griend* workers in the so-called "water phase" when the water would rise and flood the osier plantations. (Haan, Jaquet & Jeveren, 2003, p. 16)

Due to the memories of one Piet van Bragt (1931-?), whose uncle worked as the permanent farm hand of the Brooijmans family at the Amaliahoeve, we have some idea of what life was like at the farms of the Zuiderklip (Baart, 2010). At the time, the Zuidwaard of the Biesbosch counted twelve farms. Each farm had three or four permanent workers and five to six seasonal supports. One of those workers lived with his family in a cottage at the farm permanently, while the others came over every week from Drimmelen or Werkendam on the mainland. They would set out from there every Monday morning at 7 in row boats and later by ferry, bringing their own bread, bacon, eggs and some vegetables. Arriving at the farm, they would work from 5 am to 6 pm during the week, until they traveled back to Drimmelen on Friday. Nights were spent in a brick shed with an open fire, simple cots and external toilet. At night, everyone would boil their own net of potatoes, play some cards and go to bed at 9 pm (Baart, 2010, 5-9). The work was hard, but life as an agricultural labourer was better than life at the wet and windy *grienden*. Piet van Bragt remembers his time as worker on polder Turfzakken: '*Het was zalig stil op de polders. Buiten de mensen met wie je werkte, zag je alleen de postbode(s) over de dijk gaan.*' ['It was gloriously quiet on the polders. Apart from the people you worked with, you would only see the mail man passing over the dike'] (Baart, 2010, 9). Workers' and farmers' children living on one of the polder islands would move in with family or into boarding schools on the mainland if they had to go to school. Some farmers had a small boat that could take them to church on Sunday. Reaching a hospital could take over a day. Van Bragt also remembers that Hector Carlier, the landowner, would visit his land every summer for a week, during which he stayed in the house at the Amaliapolder (Baart, 2010, 11-13). After World War II, life changed. *Griendwerkers* became builders on the mainland where they could live with their families, and new technologies and materials replaced the need for reed and osier branches, and for the people cutting them. The farming Brooijmans family at the Amaliahoeve persisted. On 1951, father Jan Brooijmans was killed by lightning, and his widow took over the running of the farm. Her hard work, combined with bringing up her ten children, earned her a visit from Queen Juliana. In 1968, Marie left the farm to her oldest son Toine, who had to sell the farm and polder because the Amaliapolder would become part of the fourth water basin. (Wijk, 2009, 83).

Fig. C60 – The barn and former workers' house of the Amaliahoeve as seen from the bank of the creek Keesjes Killeke

Fig. C61 – The silhouette of the barn in front of the high dike of De Gijster water reservoir, seen from the northern section of the Amaliapolder dike. The picture shows the relatively small size of the polder plateau.

PART 3

Site analysis

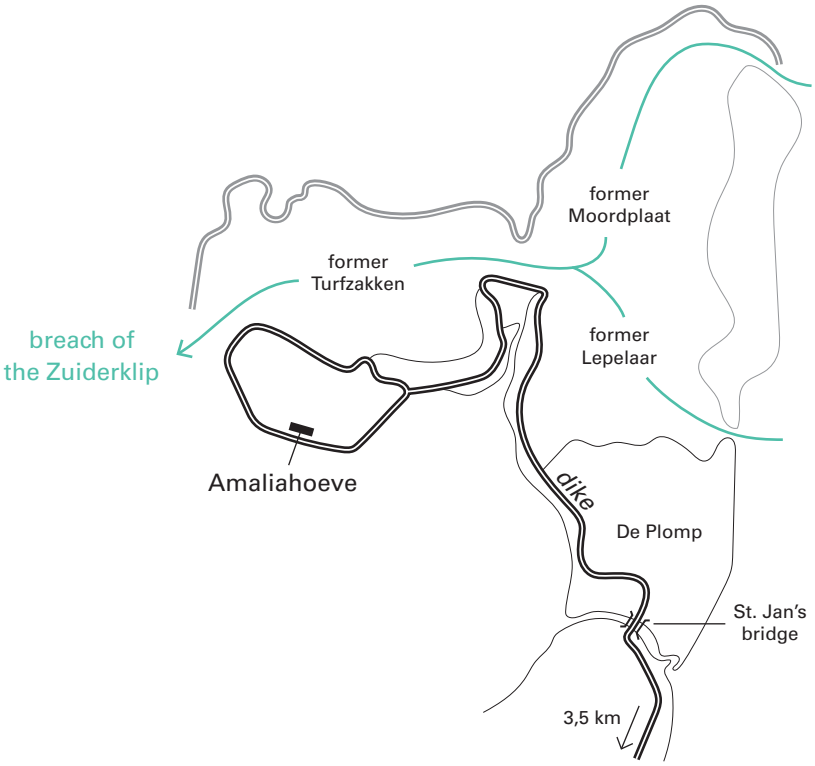


Fig. C62 – Scheme of the Amaliahoeve and the dike that connects it to other plateaus.

The Amaliahoeve lies near the geographical heart of the Zuidwaard, the southern half of the Brabantse Biesbosch, overlooking the polder from its dike position. From here, a dike connects the southern half of the Zuiderklip with the plateaus south of De Plomp (fig. C62). In total, one could follow the dike for over 7 km, passing many species of osier trees, plants and birds, the occasional ruin or remnant of agricultural activity and Scottish highlanders. The Biesbosch landscape forms a vast and marshy backdrop, where beauty and diversity are in the details. In this part, we will look into those details and analyse the landscape and architectural characteristics of this part of the Biesbosch.

March

Fig. C63 – Bare osier trees on a thick blanket of branches in March

September

Fig. C64 – Thick bushes of osier trees, sweet smelling *balsemien* flowers, *kleefkruid*, *hoefblad* and the occasional poplar tree in September.

Fig. C65 – breach of the Zuiderklip in March, barren and with high water.

Fig. C66 – breach of the Zuiderklip in September, with high grasses and retreating water.

Fig. C67 – the former Turfzakken polder, covered with reed beds ready to be cut.

Fig. C68 – the former Turfzakken polder, with lush young reed beds.

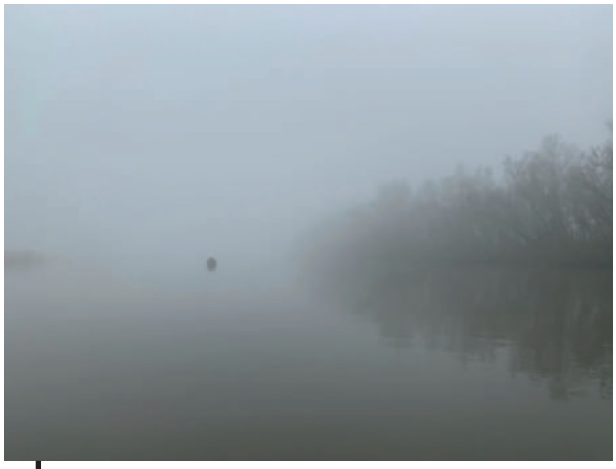


Fig. C69 – The Biesbosch on an early morning in April

Fig. C70 – The Biesbosch on a sunny summer's day

The Biesbosch has many rhythms. Once it was 'colonised' on a weekly basis, by labourers setting out from the border villages on Monday mornings and retreating to the mainland again at the end of the week. Now, visitors arrive in summer tides, occupying the Biesbosch during sunny weekends and withdrawing in fall. Off-season and on early mornings, the route to the Amaliahoeve leads the visitor through misty serenity, but in the summer, it can be busy on the water. These seasonal and tidal rhythms of visitors moving in and out affect the atmosphere both on water and on land.

Of course, the landscape itself changes throughout the seasons as well. In winter, when once the reed and osiers were cut, the landscape becomes barren, while in summer, the polders and *griend* plateaus are taken over by high grasses, wildly growing osier trees and an array of plants and flowers.

Fig. C71 – map of the Zuiderklip with projected on it the former polders

0 500 m

Legend

- Water
- Land
- Dike
- Former dike
- Former polder ditch
- Zuiderklip breach flow
- (Former) farm building

Fig. C72 –The Zuiderklip in an aerial photos. Dikes were breached on several location, allowing the river to partly relief the Bergse Maas (Google Maps)

The map on the left shows a section of the Zuiderklip, consisting of the (former) polders Kwestieus (Amaliapolder), Moordplaat, Turfzakken, Lepelaar and De Plomp. Middelveldpolder and Mokenpolder (where Carlier's other two farms were located) together with De Gijster and Heemplaat were sacrificed when the water reservoirs were dug. The Zuiderklip was planned to become the fourth basin, but this fell through and its polders remained largely unchanged until the *Ruimte voor de Rivier* plan 'Ontpoldering Zuiderklip' in c. 2009. The dikes were breached on several place, allowing the river to flow through the polders from the Steurgat to the Amer. Several buildings were removed, among which the Victoriahoeve on the Turfzakken polder.

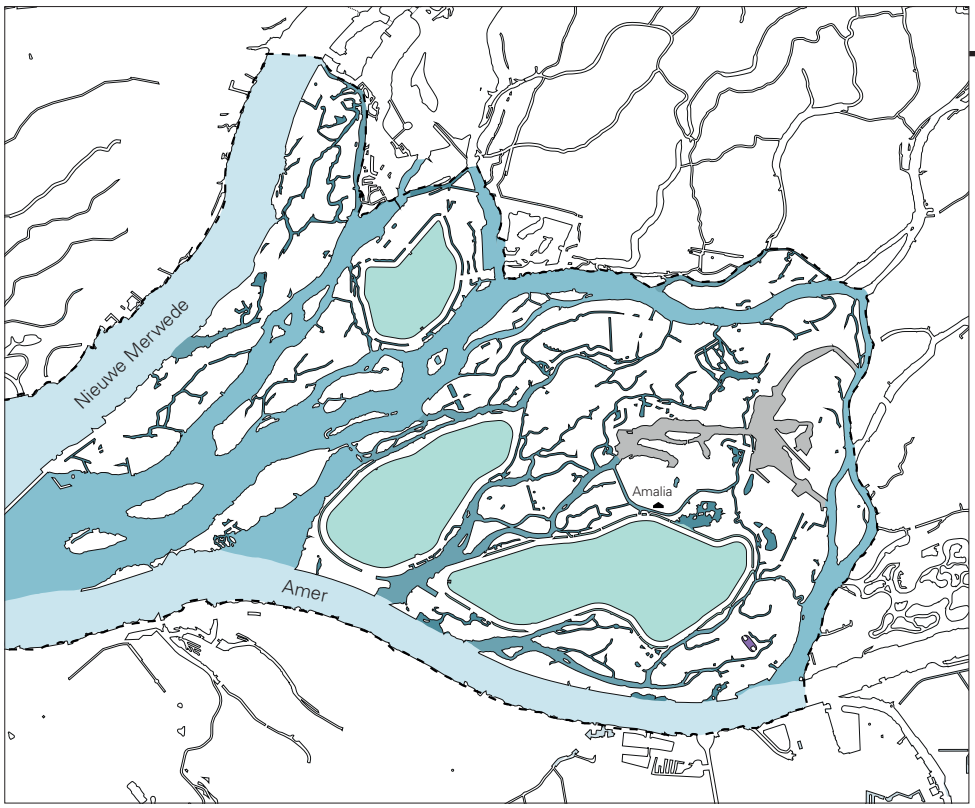


Fig. C73 – Map of water features of the Zuidwaard

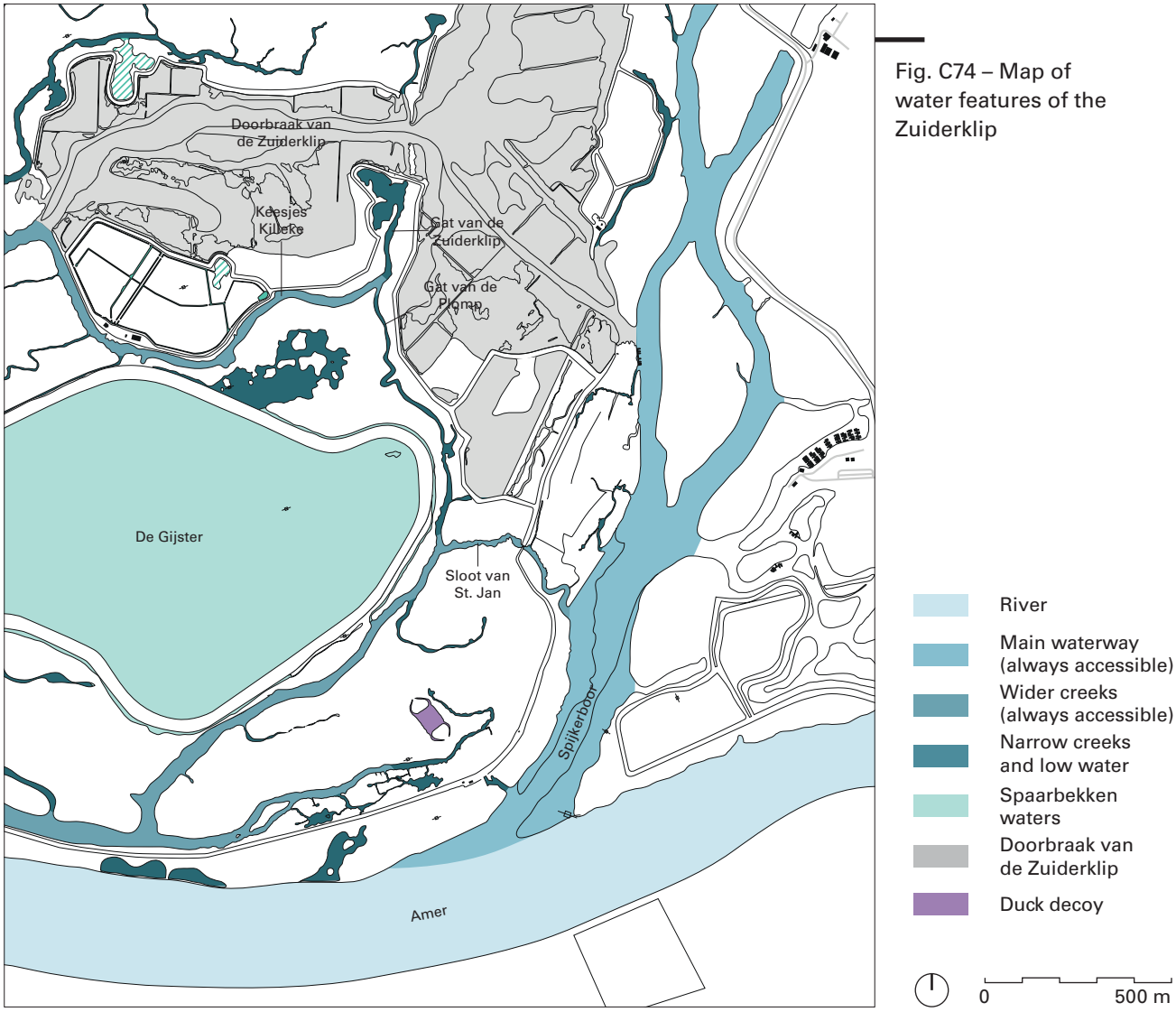


Fig. C74 – Map of water features of the Zuiderklip

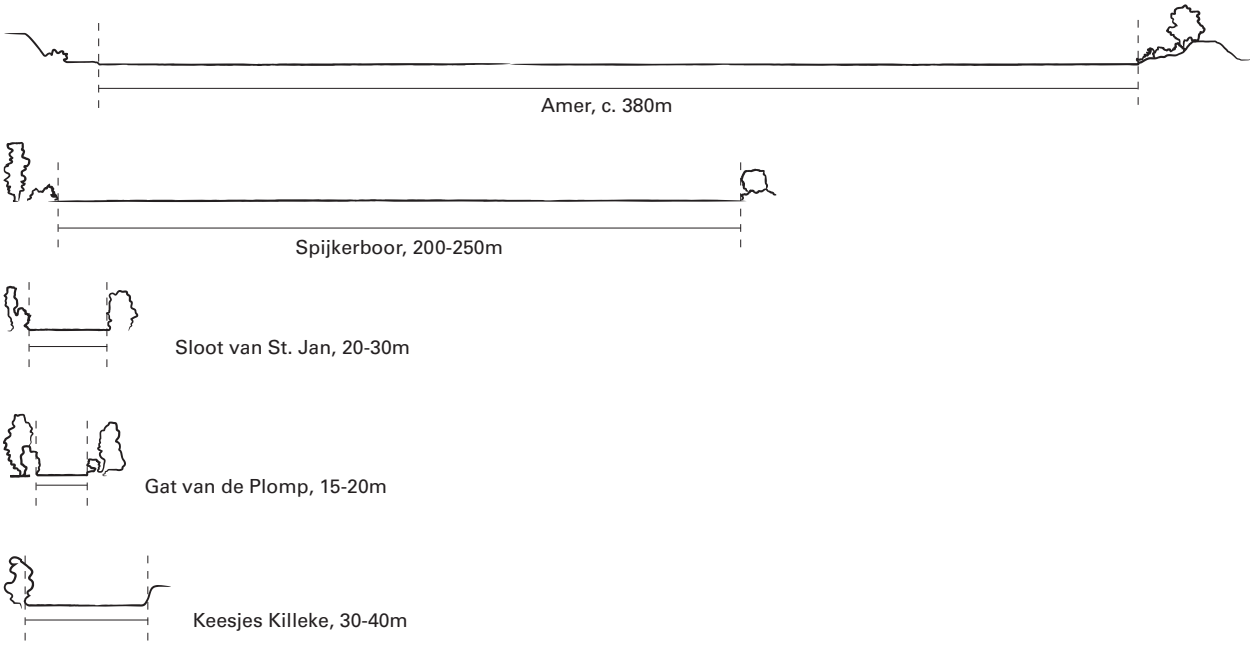


Fig. C75 – waters and their varying widths on the boat route from Drimmelen to the Amaliahoeve

The Biesbosch was shaped by a collaboration between man and water. To this day, the polders edges follow the flow of the creeks and waterways. This resulted in a rich landscape of a high variety of water features, expanded further with the breach of the Zuiderklip and the construction of the water reservoirs. Driving a boat or kayak through the Biesbosch, one enters the narrow, winding creeks from the wide plains of the Amer river.

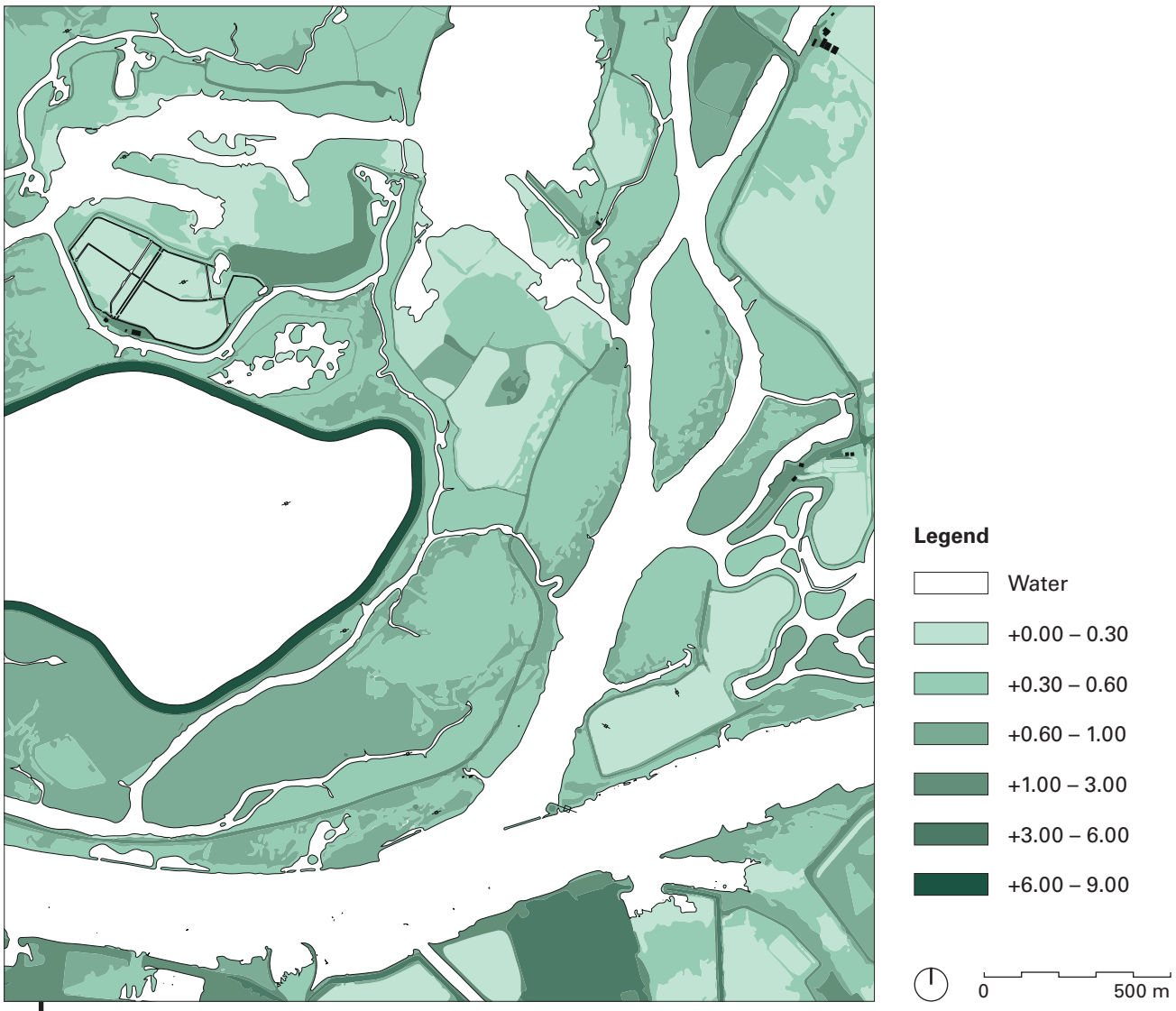


Fig. C76 – Relief map of the Zuiderklip (data source: ahn.arcgisonline.nl/ahnviewer)

Fig. C77 – On the water

Fig. C78 – On the dike

Fig. C79 – Below the dike

Fig. C80 – On the observation tower

A boat ride around and walk on the southern section of the Zuiderklip will, as everywhere else in the Biesbosch, will provide one with a sequence of changing perspectives. Although the Biesbosch is a mostly flat delta landscape, the slight differences in height provide one with different views and experiences of the landscape. Low down on the water, one can often not look beyond the banks of the rivers and creeks rimmed with trees, grass and reed or dikes. Once on land, the view often remains limited, until one climbs up the dikes and gains a new perspective over the polders and water bodies behind them. On several occasions, one is invited to widen the view even further, like on the observation tower on the former Turfzakken polder. For a tower, the observation deck is still remarkably low, meaning that even on the highest point, one's outlook is never infinite and remains obstructed by trees.

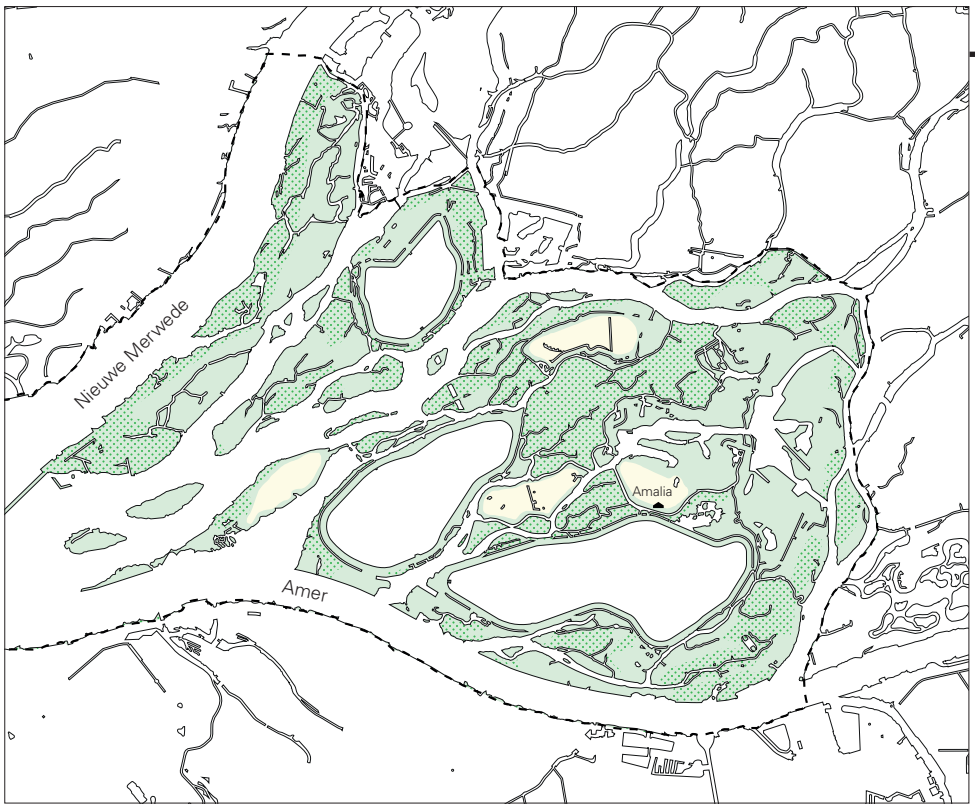


Fig. C81 – Map of water features of the Zuidwaard

Fig. C82 – Map of water features of the Zuiderklip (data source: atlasleefomgeving.nl)

Fig. C83 – Slikken

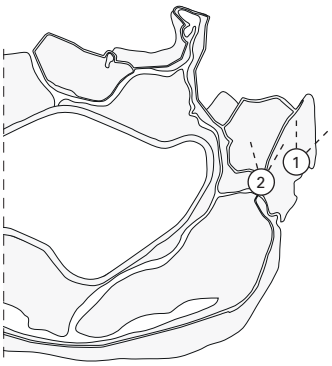
Fig. C84 – Gorzen

Fig. C85 – Grienden

Fig. C86 – Polders and dikes

The island of the Zuidwaard are rich in diversity. From the Amaliahoeve, you can walk to all the four stages of Biesbosch formation: *slikken*, *gorzen*, *grienden* and polders. Especially in summer, there are many different species of plants and flowers.

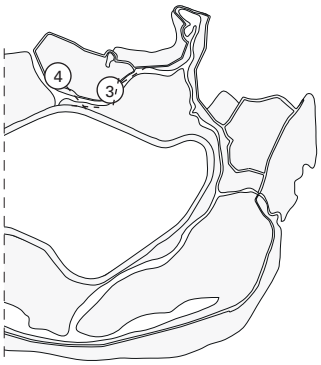
In the landscape as a whole, openness and enclosedness, prospect and shelter, are constantly interchanged, creating – seen in the light of a contemplative and relaxing environment – a well-balanced environment of mystery and overview (see essay 2 for more on this). What follows is a spatial analysis of the various levels of openness and enclosedness.



Fully enclosed landscape

Fig. C87 – Feral-growing osier *griend* on the Benedenste Jannezand.

Fig. C88 – Dike lined by low woods, framing the view of open landscape of the polder.



Enclosed landscape

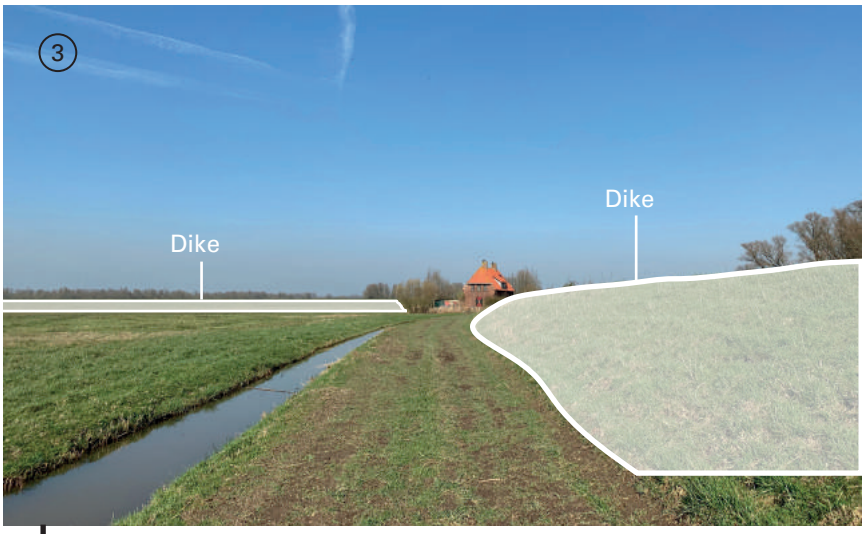
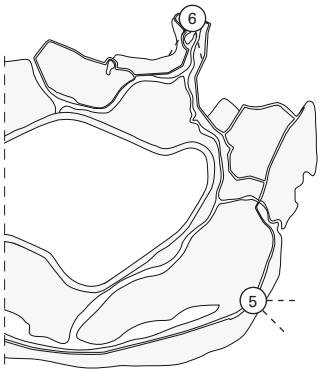


Fig. C89 – Enclosed by dikes in the Amaliapolder

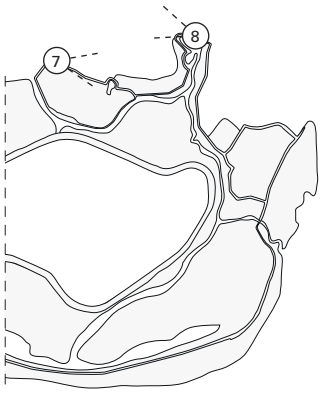
Fig. C90 – Halfway up the Amaliapolder dike, enclosed twice: by the polder dike and by the higher dike of the water reservoir De Gijster



Partly enclosed, short views

Fig. C91 – View of the river blocked by thin line of trees.

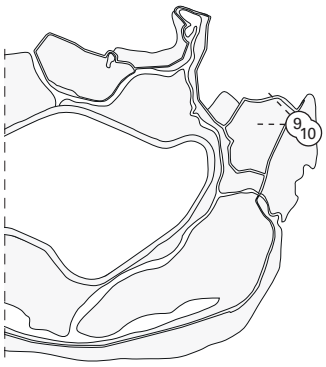
Fig. C93 – Picturesque view over small body of water bordered by trees that block the view of the high dike of water reservoir De Gijster.



Half-enclosed, long views

Fig. C92 – Partly framed vista over de flooded Zuiderklip as seen from the dike.

Fig. C94 – View over the Zuiderklip from below the dike.



Act of the dike

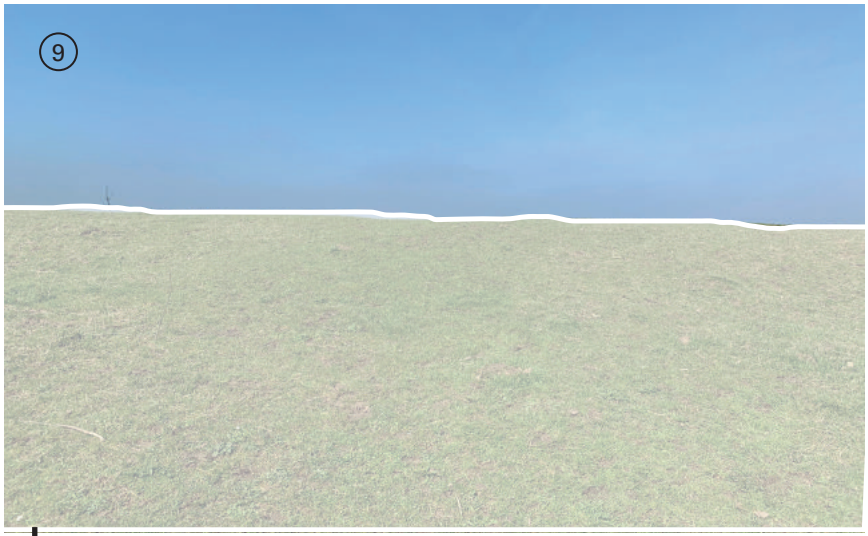
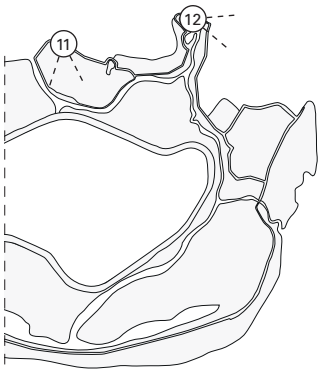


Fig. C95 – Emerging from the griend, one encounters the dike that blocks the view...

Fig. C96 – ... but once one clambers up the dike, the landscape opens up completely in front of one's eyes.



Open landscape

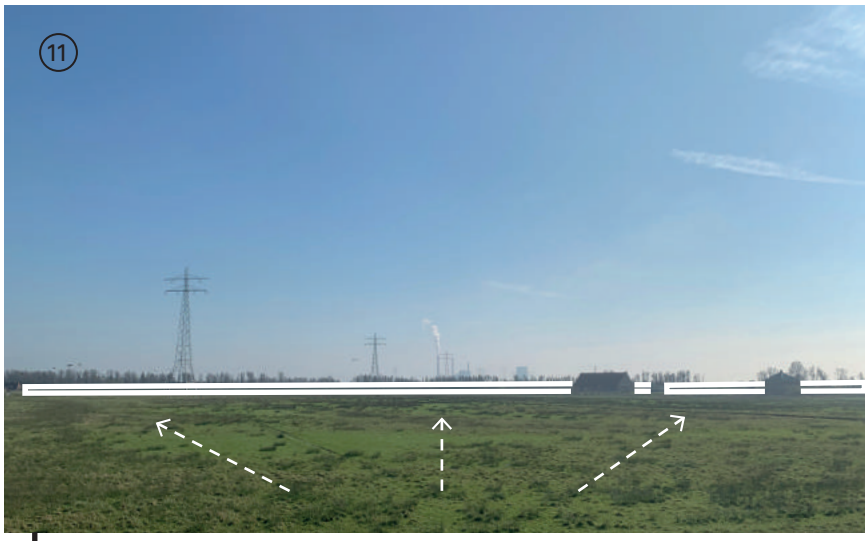


Fig. C97 – View from the northern dike of the Amaliahoeve, limited on the horizon by the dikes of the polder and De Gijster, and behind them the Amercentrale.

Fig. C98 – View from the observation tower over the flooded Zuiderklip.

Fig. C99

Water
Land
Dike
Walking route
Boat routes
Electricity pylon

Built structures

1 Worker's shed – Amaliapolder
2 Barn – Amaliapolder
3 Farmer's house – Amaliapolder
4 Farmer's house – Turfzakken
5 Observation tower
6 Worker's shed – De Plomp
7 Farm – De Lepelaar
8 Remnants of worker's shed – Benedenste Jannezand
9 'Brugje van St. Jan'
10 Worker's shed ruin
11 Amercentrale

0 500 m

Landscape

A Breaches in Zuiderklip dikes
B Boat landings
C Duck decoy
D Highlander feeding area
E Osier *griend*
F Reed field

Fig. C100: Breached dike of De Turfzakken polder

Fig. C101: The dikes and polder fields of the Amaliahoeve, De Lepelaar and De Plomp are grazed by Highland cattle, cared for by a nearby farmer.

Fig. C102: A reed field on the plateau Benedenste Jannezand

Fig. C103: A former osier *griend* on the plateau Benedenste Jannezand. The *griend* has largely grown feral, but some sections are still maintained.

The map on the right shows some of the highlights of the Zuiderklip, consisting of built structures and special moments in the landscape. On the following pages these highlights are introduced, after which we further analyse some of them (namely, the farm buildings of the Amaliapolder and the cottage ruin on the Benedenste Jannezand plateau.

Fig. C104 – The former tenant house of the Amaliahoeve, built in 1938. Now a private vacation house and a national monument.

Fig. C105 – The monumental barn of the Amaliahoeve, built in 1938. Also a national monument.

Fig. C106 – Once the tenants's house, built in 1912. From 1938 onwards a worker's family's house. Now the house of Hennie, and a municipal monument.

Fig. C107 – Double worker's dwelling built in 1939 as part of Amaliahoeve, now a private vacation home.

Fig. C108 – Viewing platform on the dike between De Lepelaar en Turfzakken

Fig. C109 – Built as a workers' shed of polder De Plomp, now the vacation home of Bart and Linda.

Fig. C110 – Remnants of a former *griendwerker*'s keet on the Benedenste Jannezand, see fig. C114-C121 for more.

Fig. C111 – Brugje van St Jan, municipal heritage site

Fig. C112 – Ruin of a former workers' shed.

Fig. C113 – Amercentrale, coal- and biomass-fired power plant in Geertruidenberg

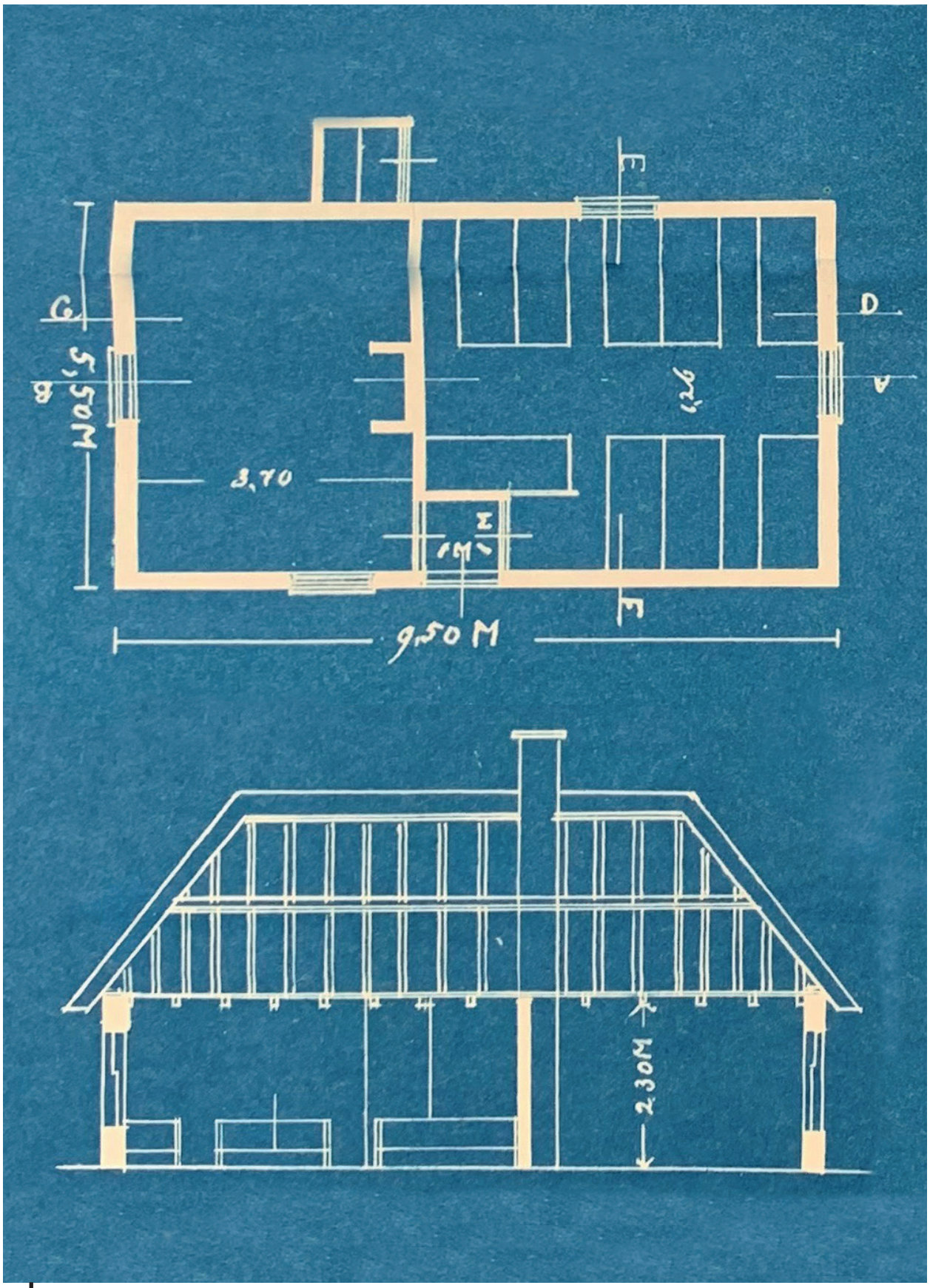


Fig. C114 – Drawing for the worker's cottage on the Benedenste Jannezand of 9,50 to 5,50 meters, housing 9 workers. (Regionaal Archief Tilburg 2352, inv. no. 1046)

Fig. C115 – Path through the *griend* of the Benedenste Jannezand plateau.

Fig. C116 – Small track leading up a mount from the main path of the *griend*

Fig. C117 – Concrete base of the worker's cottage and remnants of walls and toilet still visible.

Fig. C118 – View into the *griend* from the mount, secluded by thick bushes, trees and osiers.

Fig. C119 – Far reaching view down the entrance path, framed by trees.

Fig. C120 – At the bottom of the path a small creek connects the site to the Biesbosch's main waterways.

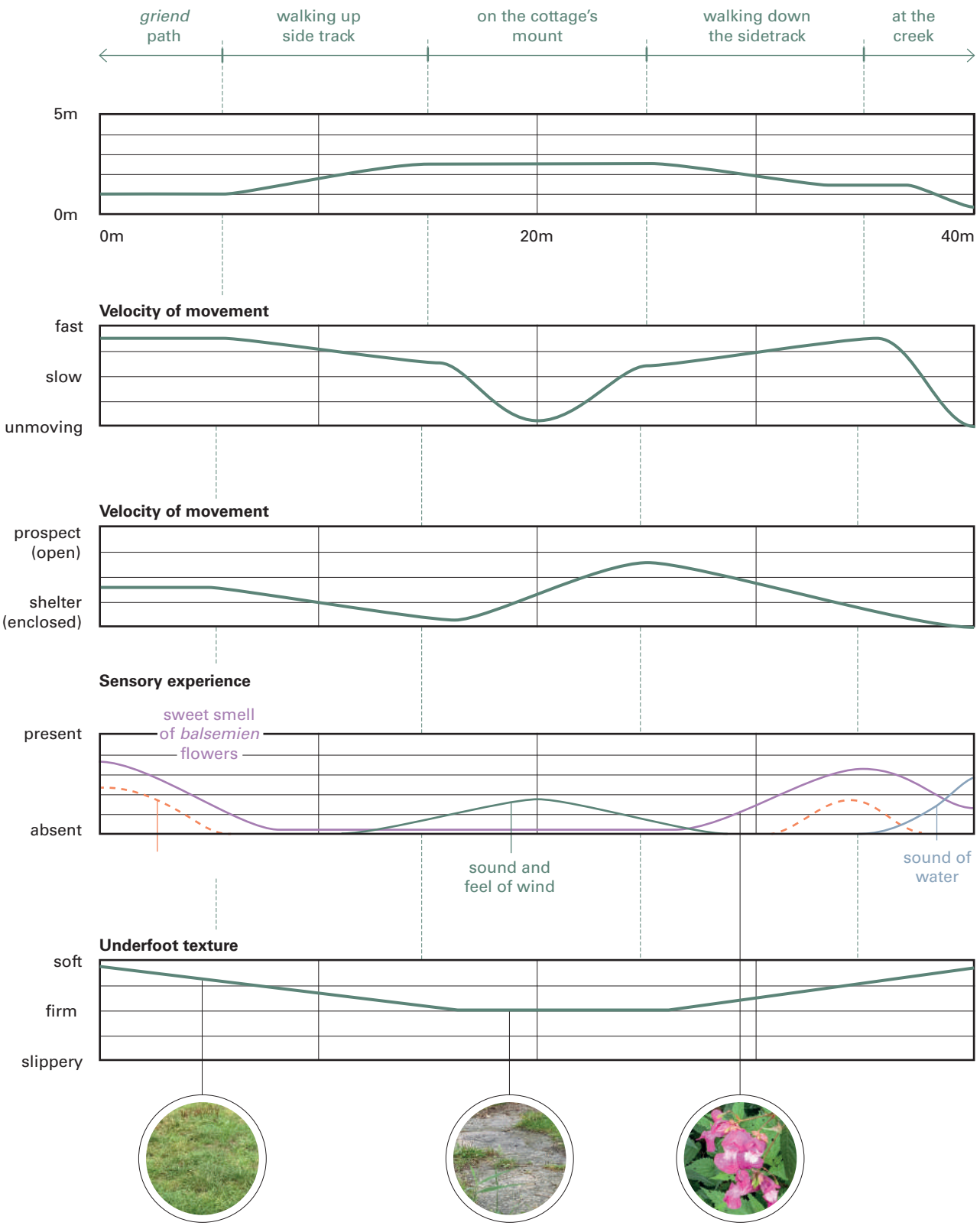


Fig. C121 – route from *griend* path to cottage mount and back down to creek

In fig. C121we track the route to the cottage's remnants on the mount. These so-called 'scores' track the sensory experiences, textures, sounds and movement (De Wit, 2014, 138). The scores above show the route that is also shown in fig. C115-120, so from the *griend* path up the mount to the remnants of the worker's cottage, circling the ruin and moving back down again over the same side track, crossing the *griend* path and arriving at the small creek.

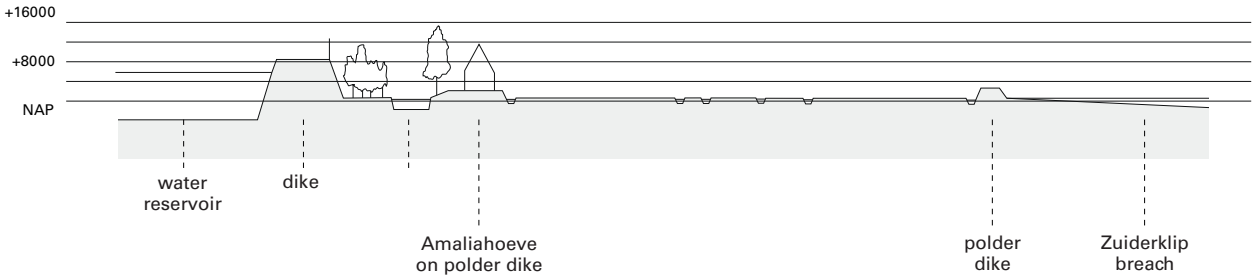


Fig. C122 – Map and section of the Amaliapolder

The Amaliapolder is the last polder in the Zuiderklip that is almost completely intact, apart from a small section on the northwestern end that was altered in the 'Ontpoldering Zuiderklip' project. On the north side of the polder is a small *wiel*, a pool of water let in through an unplanned breach in the dike many decades ago. It is possible that it was created after the North Sea flood of 1953, because the *wiel* is visible on the maps drafted shortly after this disaster (topotijdreis.nl).

Standing in the polder, one is visually enclosed twice: first by the Amaliapolder's own dike (ca. 3m) and then by the higher dike of water reservoir De Gijster on the south side and the northern dike of the polder Turfzakken on the opposite side. Especially the straight line of the water reservoir dike is strongly present, functioning as a sort of backdrop of a theater stage or the backrest of a sofa. Following this metaphor, the position of the farm now seems to have a more northern orientation, towards the open field, but the architecture of the barn, shed and villa reveal that historically, the complex was orientated towards the creek.

From the polder, longer views extend eastwards over the water of the Zuiderklip breach, which is not accessible by boat. Keesjes Killeke, running along the southside of the farm, is accessible by boat and is a popular route in summer.

Fig. C123 – farm seen from the west side of the Amaliapolder

Fig. C124 – farm seen from the north side of the Amaliapolder

Fig. C125 – farm seen from the south side of the Amaliapolder, where the path runs along the bottom of the dike

Fig. C126 – farm seen from Keesjes Killeke coming from the east

Fig. C127 – farm seen from Keesjes Killeke coming from the west

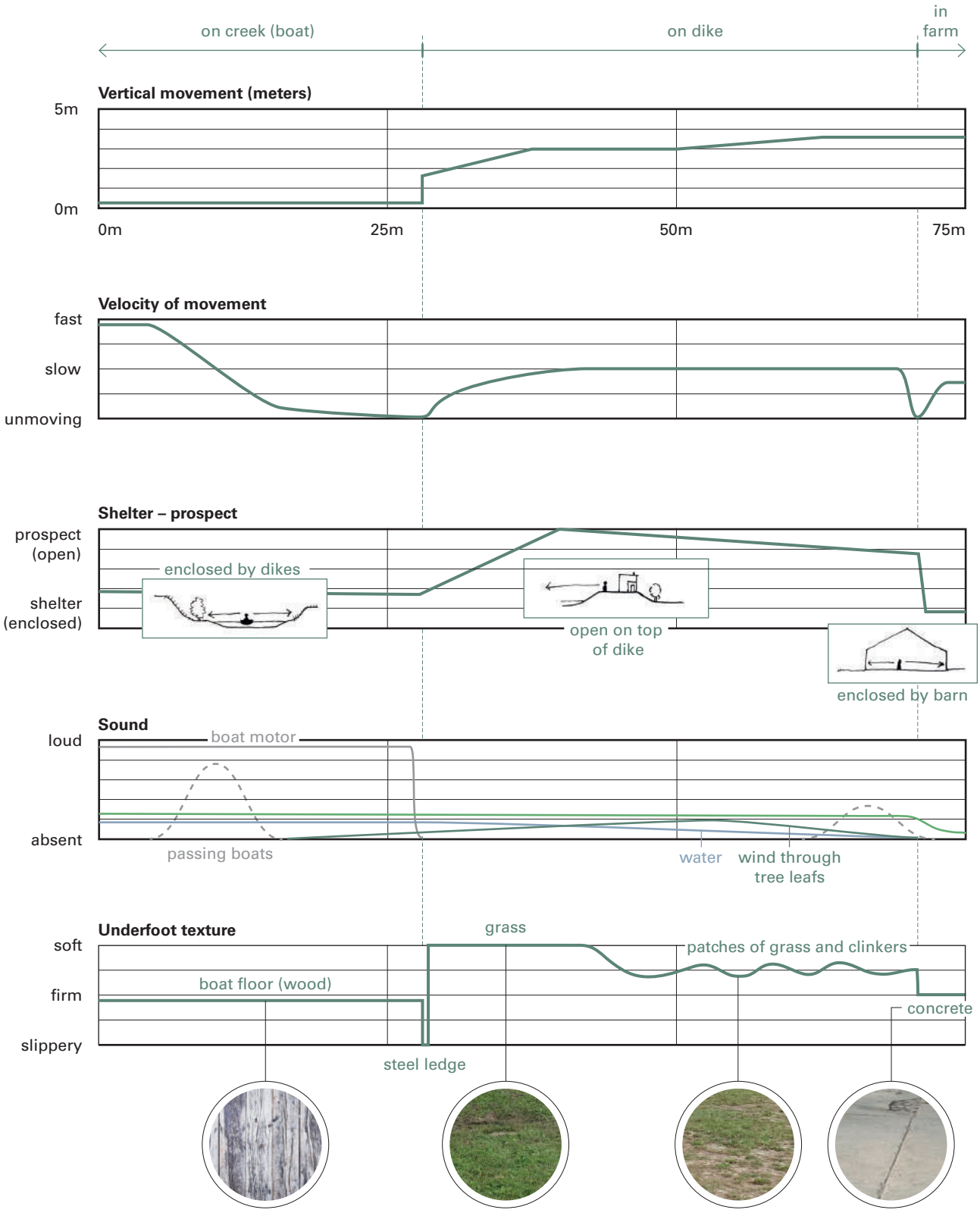


Fig. C128 – Score of the arrival at the barn, tracking the experience from the boat on Keesjes Killeke, to the landing, to the walk up the dike, ending in the barn's interior

Fig. C129 – The Amaliahoeve in c. 1940. On the top of the front facade, we can still see the clock, and on the right, a high stack of hay is brought in. (Hennie Killner's personal archive, original source unknown)

The Amaliahoeve consists of four buildings: the tenant's house and the barn, a small, white-washed house that once functioned as a workers' cottage and is now the home of the 78-year-old Hennie, and a double workers' cottage further down the dike. Both the tenant's house and the double cottage are in use as a private vacation house. The barn is mostly disused, apart from occasional military trainings and Staatsbosbeheer events, and will be the main focus of the project. The barn and villa are registered as a heritage site of national importance. With this come restrictions and required care in the transformation of these structures. What follows is a short building history of all four buildings, mostly based on the analysis of Johan van den Eijnden from Monumentenhuis Brabant in 2009. This report includes a value assessment based on spatial, historical, ensemble and architectural qualities. This method is often used in the redevelopment of heritage, to ensure that a monument's unique qualities and historical importance are not negatively affected. It is important that this analysis and assessment are made by a different party than the designer, owner or client, to make sure that the conclusions are objective and not influenced by future transformation plans. The value assessment is included in appendix 1. In the discussion of each structure, the conclusions of Van den Eijnden's analysis are included. The value assessment distinguishes intangible and tangible elements of high (marked blue in the drawings), positive (green) or indifferent value. This relates to the degree of conservation or transformation that is desired. The value assessment is intended not as a set of strict rules, but as a guideline, a compass for transformation, protecting the core characteristic, identity and unique qualities of the monument.

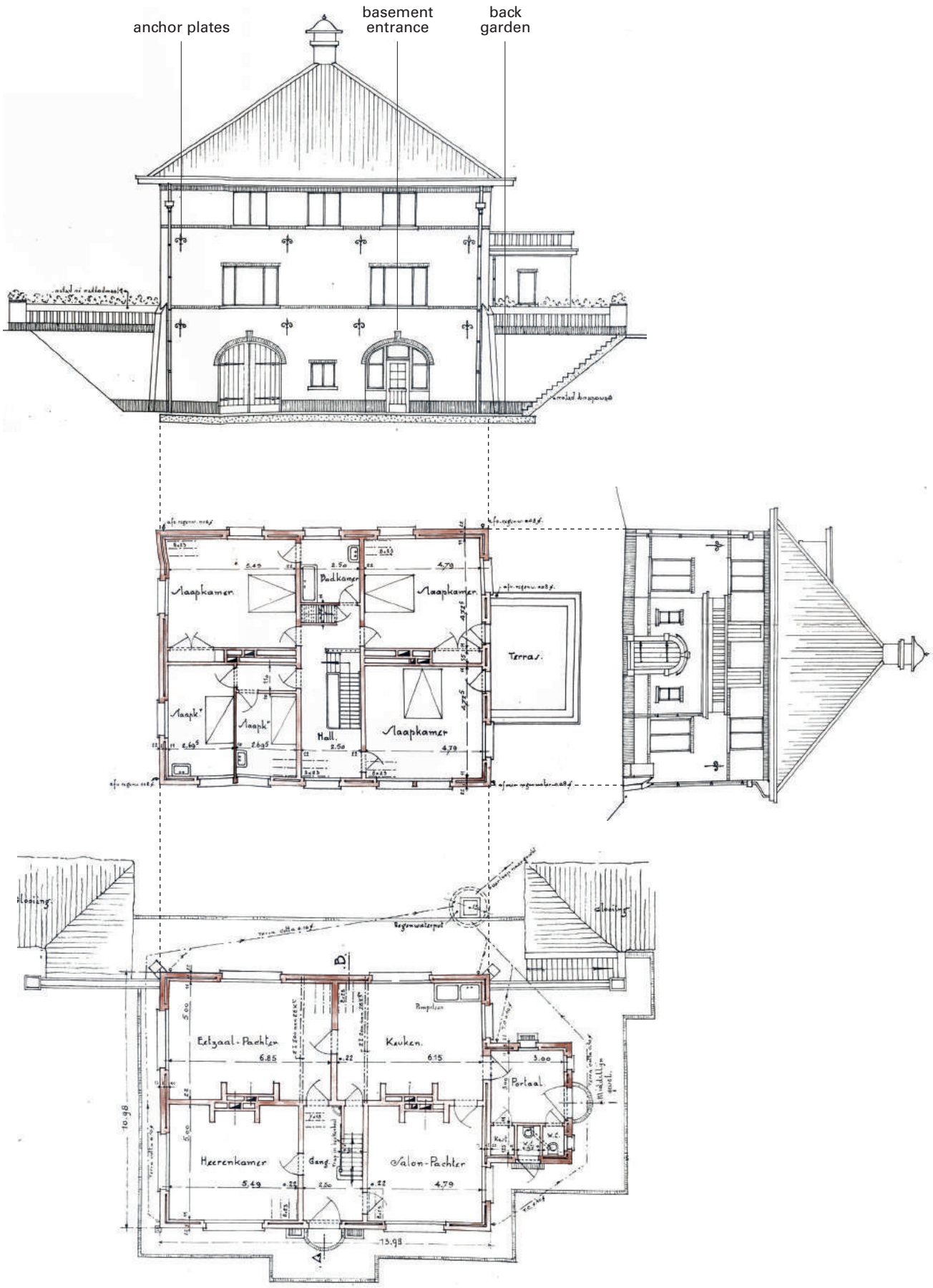


Fig. C129 – Drawings of the tenant's house (Regionaal Archief Tilburg 2352, inv. no. 1046)

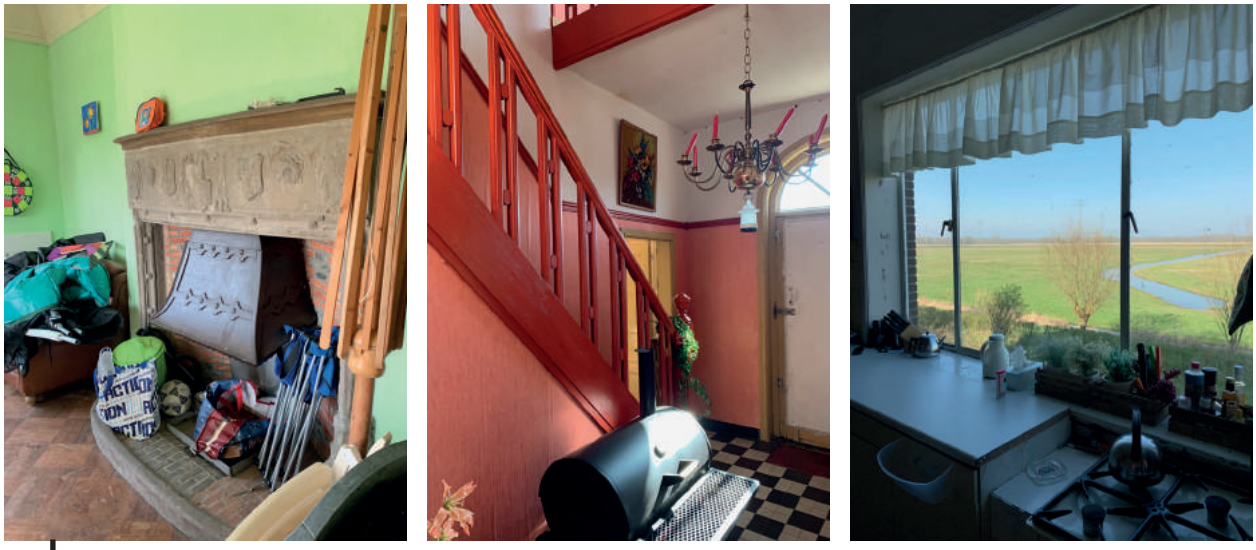


Fig. C130-132 – shots of the tenant's house interior

Hector Carlier submitted his proposal for a new, remarkably grand farmer tenant's villa designed by a local architect named Bakker on 15 May 1938, and renewed the submission in June (Regionaal Archief Tilburg 2352, inv. no. 1044). The newly wedded Jan and Marie Brooijmans became tenants in 1939, and would fill the house with nine children in the years that followed (Baart, 2010, 5). The floor plan of the house is simple but – compared to other Biesbosch farms of that time – sumptuous. Since the Brooijmans family left in 1969, the house has hardly changed. On the ground floor, there are four large rooms – including a salon for Hector Carlier if he was visiting – and a utility room, organised around a central hallway with sweeping staircase. On the first floor are five bedrooms and a bathroom. The attic is open-plan and contains a large water tank. There is no gas or electricity, the current users make do with cylinders and batteries for over 80 years. On the south side, the front facade comes out onto the dike and looks out over the creek Keesjes Killeke and the high dike of water basin De Gijster. The house is built against the slope of the dike, the north facade comes out onto the polder, from where one can access the basement through two curved gate entrances. The facades are decorated with lily-shaped anchor plates (*lelieankers*), glazed brickwork details and decorated door frames. The interior is equally rich, and contains parquetry flooring, plastered ceilings and a second-hand fireplace mantel that was decorated with coats of arms of families that held no connection to Carlier (who supposedly liked to present himself as a member of the nobility) (Van den Eijnden, 2008, 7-15).

Value assessment

- The facades, including their organisation, the windows, doors and hatches, the materials, ornaments and the highly representative appearance are of high value.
- The organisation and historical elements of the ground floor interior and the staircase are of high value.
- The organisation and historical elements of the interior of the basement and the first floor are of positive value.
- The roof construction is of high value.

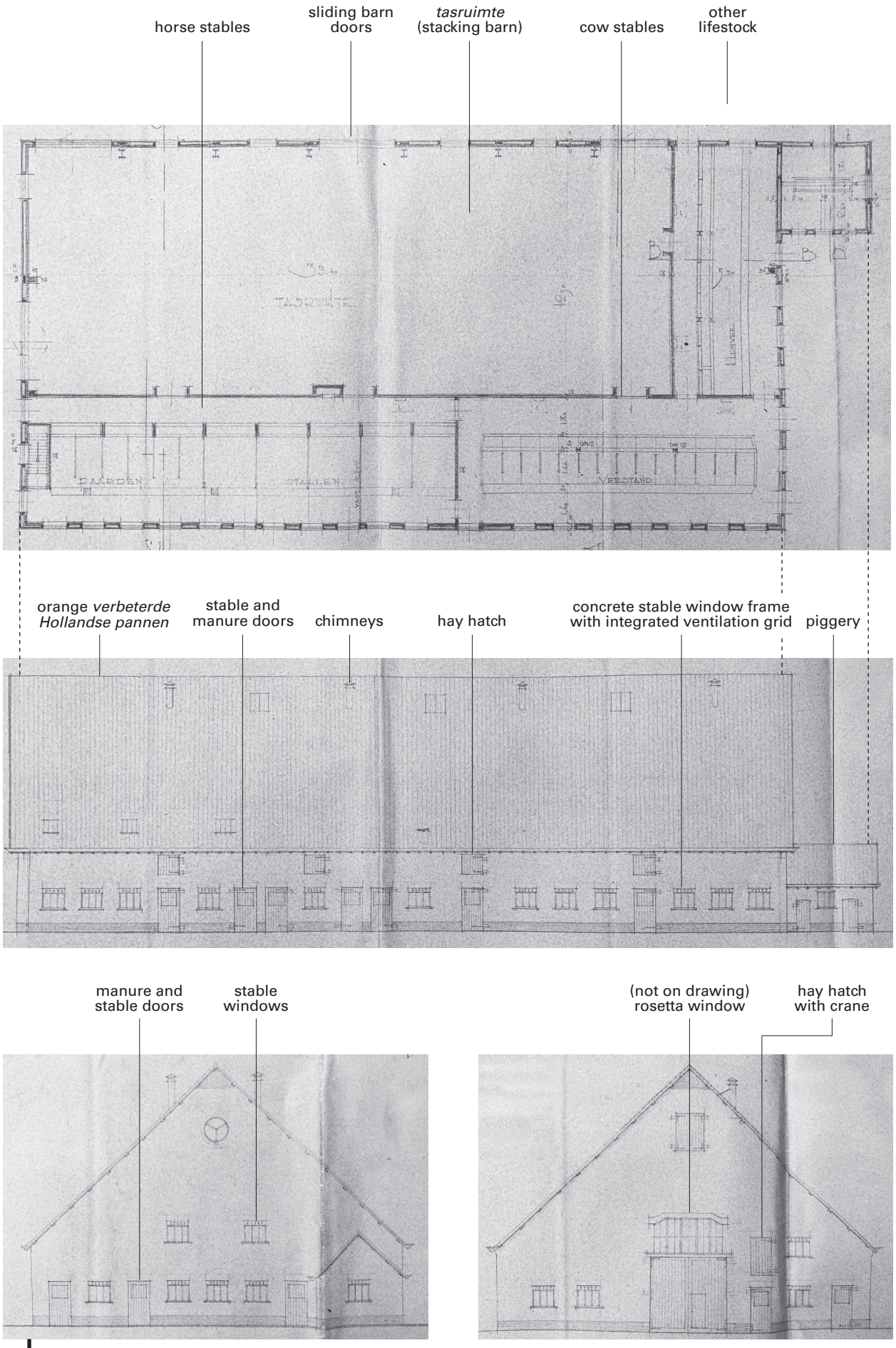


Fig. C133 – drawings of the barn of the Amaliahoeve (Regionaal Archief Tilburg 2352, inv. no. 1045)

Fig. C134-135: interior and exterior of the barn

Carlier submitted his plans for an imposing barn, designed by the architect Francisus Bernardus Sturm from Roosendaal, on 23 February 1939 (RAT 2352, inv. no. 1045/1564). The barn was large (19.5 to 39.5 meters) and ingeniously constructed with so-called *krommerspanten*, curved rafters of laminated wood that needed no further support or stability and thus kept the interior space as open and unobstructed as possible, enabling the farmer to stack his fields' produce up to the roof. When the workers could no longer reach the top of the stack, doors on various levels in the front and back facade of the farm allowed for the produce to be brought in from above. Like the tenant's house, the front-facing facade of the barn is decorated with traditionalist ornaments (in the style of the Delftse School). The front facade is especially rich in details, including a large rose window that was not included in the original plans. Above it was once a clock, still visible on old pictures. The back and north facades have a somewhat more functional character, with "manure doors" (*mestdeuren*) and ventilation inlets in the first, and three large sliding barn doors in the latter. The bright orange roof tiles rising high over the dike form a landmark both from the surrounding polders and from the water. Internally, the space is largely kept open-plan, apart from the livestock stables along the south and back facade (cattle to graze the dikes, horses and oxen for heavy work). The stables, including the glazed tiles on the walls, waalbrick floors, manure alley (*mestgang*), trough feeders and hay racks, are mostly kept intact. Hay was kept on the first floor above, and the stables were ventilated through ingenious ventilation grids in the window frames and chimneys connected to the roof. The roof was stabilised by iron strips and insulated with reed mats (Van den Eijnden, 2008, 16-19).

Architect

Franciscus Bernard Sturm (1879-1955) was trained as a carpenter, but worked as an architect on many buildings in Roosendaal and its surroundings. He designed factories, hospitals, schools, housing projects and abbeys. The drawings for the barn of the Amaliahoeve are signed both by him and his son Leonardus Franciscus Antonius Maria (Leo) Sturm (1910-1985) who studied in Delft as a student of Granpré Molière and was a fan of the Delftse School style (Het Nieuwe Instituut, n.d.).

Value assessment

- The northern, southern and western facade, including their organisation, the windows, doors and hatches, the materials, ornaments and the representative appearance are of high value.
- The eastern facade is, due to its various alterations, of positive value.
- The roof construction, innovative for its time, is of high value.
- The interior organisation is of positive value, apart from the ceiling of the stable blocks, which is of indifferent value.

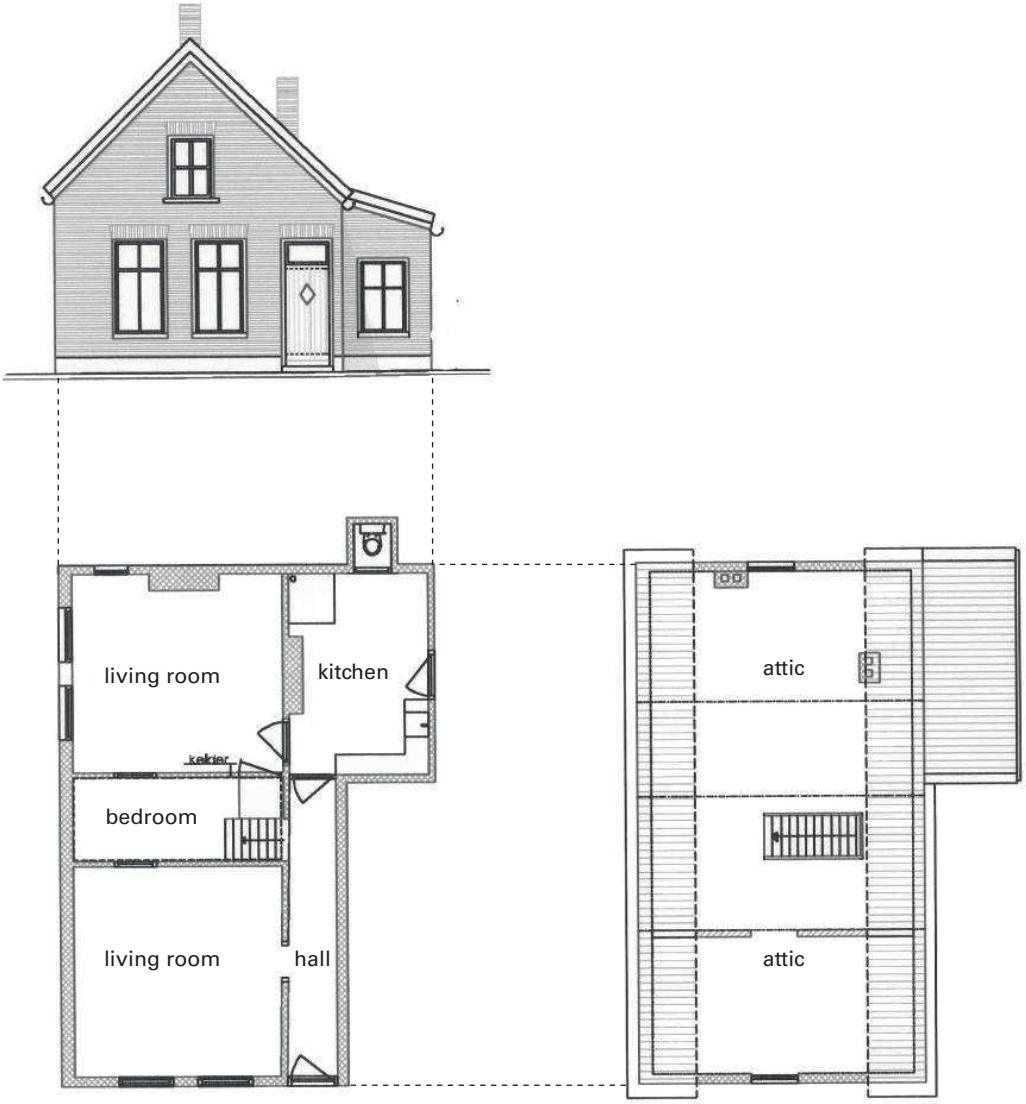


Fig. C136 – drawings of the white cottage (Eijnden, 2008, 33)

Fig. C137-139 –The white cottage, formerly the worker's cottage

The little white house on the Amaliapolder was probably built in the early 1910s by then owner Jonkheer De Grez. The *Ketenbesluit* – a law regulating the living conditions of workers in the Biesbosch – had just come through so the house had large windows for light and ventilation and a fire place for heating. The Bracht family, head farm workers of the Amaliapolder, lived here for several decades (Baart, 2010, 5-6; Van den Eijnden, 2008, 20). Today, Hennie – 'baroness of the Biesbosch' – lives here and takes care of the small house.

Value assessment

- The southern facade is, due to its position in the landscape, of high value.
- The other facades are of positive value.
- The added toilet at the back is of indifferent value.
- The organisation of the interior and the roof construction are of positive value.

Fig. C140 – Walking over the plateau of Benedenste Jannezand

Splendid isolation

‘O Biesbosch, als U kon vertellen
Van al het moois en lelijks wat U stil verborg
Van al het bitter dat een hart kan kwellen
Van alle blijdschap en van alle zorg

Biesbosch, wat van U is gebleven
Laat dat bewaard voor ‘t nageslacht
Uw mooie kreken en uw stille dreven
Uw brede water en uw stille pracht’

– excerpt from ‘Oh stukje land geklemd tussen de rivieren’, Bas van der Stelt

In this section, we have studied the characteristics of the Biesbosch landscape, zooming in on the Zuiderklip, then the Amaliapolder and finally the farm ensemble itself. All are rich in history, which is still visibly present both in the landscape and in the stories of its few remaining inhabitants. The Biesbosch and the Amaliahoeve specifically set a promising scene for the *bezinnings*-landscape. The experience that is to be orchestrated through architectural intervention can rely largely on what is already there: the presence of nature, the versatile landscape, the tranquil atmosphere and the route of the dike connecting various polders and plateaus.

Several key features can be of value in embedding this new program of a bezinnings-landscape in the landscape of the Zuiderklip:

A. Key features of the Biesbosch landscape

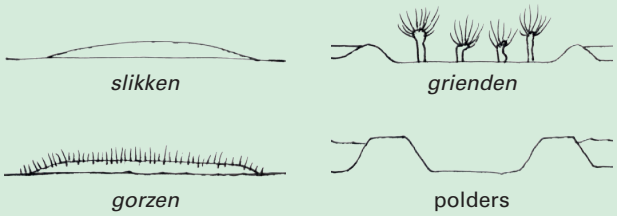
1 *The balance of man and nature*, the main theme of the Biesbosch’s history. Former polders, land ‘given back’ to nature and feral-growing *grienden* show the current tendency to reformulate that balance. But it remains precarious: today, the wilful rivers and creeks, rich biodiversity and encroaching wilderness collide with increasing recreational tourism, water reservoirs and the bulching chimneys of the Amercentrale.

2 *Other-wordliness*. The natural setting of the Biesbosch poses a strong contrast with the two urban conglomerations that surround it. It forms an enclave of stillness and tranquility, a group of island that is entered only by boats (threshold). The pace is slow, forcing its visitor to surrender to its rhythm. Industrial elements form reminders of the world moving on at the fringes, and emphasise that those who have found sanctuary in the Biesbosch are – for the time being – no longer part of that world.

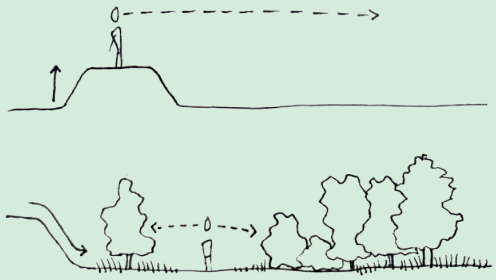
4 *The seasonal tides of visitors.* In summer the Biesbosch can be busy with visitors both on the water and on the land. In winter, it is quiet and solitary.

B. Key features of the Zuiderklip

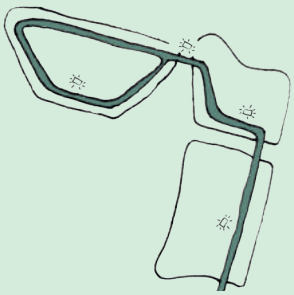
1 *From* slik *to polder*. On the Zuiderklip, one can cross two centuries of history on a short walk. The four stages of the Biesbosch's landscape formation are all there: *slikken*, *gorzen*, feral osier *grienden* and polders. The Amaliahoeve is the only polder that is still mostly intact.



2 *Rhythm of high and low, open and enclosed*. Even though a polder is a relatively horizontal landscape, the alternation of moving over water, land and dikes, surrounded by open polders and dense osier woodlands enables a rich and varied experience of openness and enclosedness.



3 *The dike as a connecting body*. At the height of the agricultural heydays, almost all polders of the Zuiderklip were amalgamated. Today, the dikes remain as a last connecting body between the southern plateaus of the Zuiderklip.



C. Key features of the Amaliahoeve and polder

1 *A landmark overlooking the landscape*. The elevated position of the farm on the dike provide a characteristic open view over the surrounding landscape. Simultaneously, the elevated position and height of the farm set the ensemble as a landmark in the predominantly low landscape surrounding it.

3 *Remarkable architecture of cultural-historical importance.* The barn, house and cottage are of importance as a legacy of the agricultural development in the Brabantse Biebosch. In this context, the barn is one of the last ones standing, the most monumental (in size and representation) and unusually intact (in its components and ornamentation).

4 *Remarkable characteristics and ornaments of the architecture*. Important elements of the barn are: its size, the eye-catching orange-tiled roof, the representative facades and their lay-out, the stable and barn doors, the characteristic stable windows with integrated ventilation inlets, the load-bearing construction and the interior organisation of stables and open space.

5 *The interior as an outside space*: because of the typology and functionality of the barn, outdoor and indoor space flow together. There is a strong physical and visual connection with the surrounding farmyard and fields.

5 *The farm as central hub*. The farm lies as a focal point at the heart of the Zuidwaard, at the end of a long route that runs along the Zuiderklip.

Conclusion: manifesto of core values and designerly themes

As a conclusion of this site analysis, I want to propose three core values that capture the essence of the Biesbosch, the Zuiderklip and the Amaliahoeve in relation to its program as a *bezinnings*-landscape. These core values end in a set of designerly themes that will, together with the key-lessons of the essays and case studies function as the main points of departure for the design process.

1 <u>*The Biesbosch as a world of splendid isolation*</u>
As a maze of islands sandwiched in the middle of the metropolitan region of the southwest Netherlands, the Biesbosch is close, yet far-away from frantic city rhythms. The escapist move to this unusual waterscape is orchestrated by a long route of phased deceleration, switching between various modes of transport. Dotted through the landscape are reminders of industry and modernity – such as the Amercentrale – that highlight even more the otherworldliness of the Biesbosch.

Designerly themes:
- Utilise isolated position, expand the gradients of solitude, sanctuary and collectivity.
- Provide an attractive retreat environment for different lifestyles and preferences.

2 *The Biesbosch as a dynamic delta-landscape*

The Biesbosch forms a landscape of varied monotony. It consists of a simple sequence of historical layers: *slikken*, *gorzen*, *grienden* en polders, shaped by wilful rivers and creeks. Immense richness and variety lies in its details: slight differences in the height of the land, the width of the waterways and the flow of the water result in an endless gradient of atmospheres. Tidal rhythms of seasons, the water and seasonal visitors colour the landscape. The Zuidwaard lies as a remote archipelago at is heart.

Designerly themes:
- Dramatise transitions, intensify minimal differences.
- Introduce or highlight different circuits over land and water.
- Respond to and utilise tidal rhythms.

3 *The Biesbosch as a tempered wilderness*

Wilderness meets the human hand. For centuries, the Biesbosch was claimed and reclaimed, naturalised, cultivated. Polders lie as tranquil islands in the wilderness. The balance between man and nature is precarious. Remnants of agricultural and industrial upsurge dot the landscape. At the Zuiderklip, the dike runs as a thin line of cultivation through increasingly naturalised *grienden* and wetlands. The Amaliapolder forms one of the last permanent colonies, and hovers as a landmark at the heart of the Zuiderklip.

Designerly themes:
- Orchestrate a ritual of arrival, occupation and departure.
- Apply modesty in intervention: leave out all that is unnecessary and depart from what is there.
- Program different circuits and modes of use.

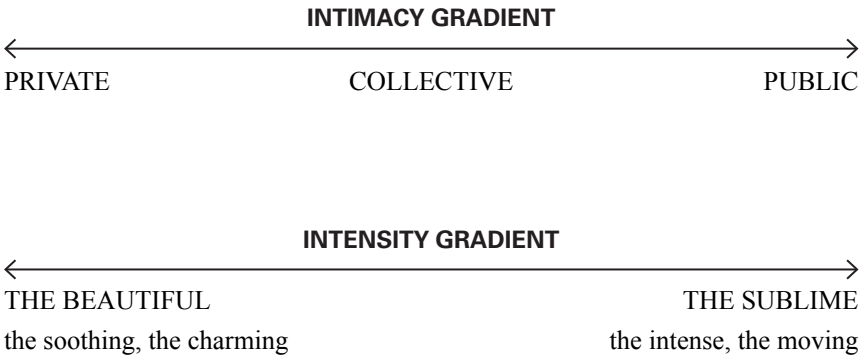


Fig. 1 – Two gradients of a setting for *bezinning*

Biesbosch *bezinnings*-landscape

Summary
The aim of this enquiry was to look into the characteristics of the *bezinnings*-landscape, a setting that encompasses architecture and landscape and is situated in a predominantly natural environment. It is a complete landscape of interiors, exteriors and in-betweens that together invite different modes of *bezinning*, ranging from passive to active – according to personal preference. '*Bezinning*', in this context, is an inclusive term, that can have different meanings to anyone. Broadly, it can signify feelings of relaxation, retreat, restoration, contemplation, meditation and transcendence.

This enquiry started with an analysis of literature from various fields of study, resulting in theoretical framework. Important conclusions are:

- that the distinction between nature and culture is highly complex and that, especially in the Dutch landscape, it is impossible to clearly define either. There are other definitions of nature, such as that of Three Natures, that provide a more inclusive and less definite approach;
- that in nature, we look to escape morale, to become part of something that does not allow to be appropriated physically, nor mentally, something that provides us with a disinterested environment where we can escape everyday rhythms, turn inwards and return to a deeper essence;
- that an important characteristic of the *bezinnings*-landscape is its lasting effect, which can be achieved by interchanging moments of beauty (the soothing, the charming) with moments of sublimity (the intense, the moving, the pattern-breaking);
- that the *bezinnings*-landscape should cater to different preferences and modes of interaction, ranging from passive to active and from public to private. And that its visitors should be able to freely move between those modes, according to their own needs and wishes.

Additionally, we have taken – apart from many designerly tools – several key lessons from the main case studies:

- The case study of Hombroich Museum Insel in Neuss, Germany showed us the power of 'being-in-a-different-world', emphatically marked by thresholds and boundaries, as an escape of everyday environments.
- Hombroich also introduced us to the importance of contextuality, that is: to the intensifying effects of a careful symbiosis of landscape and architecture.
- Abbey Roosenberg in Waasmunster, Belgium proved an important example on the way that phased transitions and simplicity can orchestrate articulated use and movement and enforce slower rhythms.
- Castle Slangenburg showed us how influential an environment can be in relation to behaviour and interaction. It also emphasised the importance of catering to different needs and preferences when it comes to privacy, motive and activity.
- This conclusion was consolidated by the one-question interviews, to which the answers were highly diverse and ranged from activities to places, from everyday environments to distinct memories, from mostly natural, to more urban or interior environments, from very private to more collective settings.

Concerning the site, a grand farm, dating back to the 1930s, at the heart of the Zuidwaard in the Biesbosch, the analysis concluded in a set of three core values, relating to the site's key features and concluding in designerly themes. The core values of the Amaliahoeve in the Biesbosch are:

- A world of splendid isolation: the Biesbosch

takes in an isolated position as a group of islands in the middle of urban conglomeration. Reaching the Amaliahoeve requires a long route of phased deceleration, removing the visitors from daily patterns.

- A dynamic delta-landscape: in this vast marshland, variety lies in the details. The rich landscape of *slikken*, *gorzen*, *grienden*, polders and *kreken* provides many degrees of openness, expanse and intensity. This is coloured by the tidal rhythms of seasons, water levels and visitors.
- A tempered wilderness: the surroundings of the Amaliahoeve are speckled with remnants of agricultural upsurge and hardship. The balance between industrialism, cultivation and wilderness is intense, yet precarious.

Additionally, the farm complex is a national heritage site, leading to technical and aesthetic challenges when embedding the new program in this historical context. Yet, the surrounding landscape, the farm's architectural qualities and especially the site's rich history hold many features that, together with the integration of additional program, lends itself as a fruitful setting for *bezinning*.

Conclusions

In the introduction, the main research question was formulated, and I will repeat it here: *What characterises a place for* bezinning *at the intersection of architecture, landscape architecture and the natural setting?*

Two recurring themes stood out: that of PUBLIC <> PRIVATE (closely linked to: outside/open <> inside/enclosed) and of THE BEAUTIFUL <> THE SUBLIME (with which I mean the soothing/the charming <> the intense/the moving). It is important to emphasise here that they are gradients, encompassing an – in theory – endless amount of degrees. Corresponding to this is the importance of transitions (spatial and atmospherical). By focussing on the in-between steps, we can slow down an experience, increase or decrease tensions, cater to different preferences and moods, and create a more inclusive and a more explicit environment. The case studies provided valuable examples of these gradual transitions and in-between settings. At Abbey Roosenberg, movement from the main circulation space to activity-based rooms is phased into four steps of enclosure and openness, darkness and light. At the *horti conclusi* of Zumthor's Serpentine Pavilion and the Emmaus Priory a similar sequence provide access to the gardens, while at the Ordrup Garden of Brandt, the garden itself forms a sequence of different garden rooms, ranging in wildness, size and enclosedness. At Castle Slangenburg, a variety of interior spaces provide different settings of privacy and collectivity.

A second overall conclusion is related to contextuality, a term I introduced in the case study of Hombroich Museum Insel, and with which I do not only refer to the definition of an architecture that responds to its surroundings by respecting what is already there – but to an architecture and landscape that respond to each other, resulting in a strong symbiosis of architecture and landscape. Contextuality is about rootedness, belonging and a seamless, and adaptive embedding of a function in its new surroundings and history. We see this at Louisiana Museum in Denmark. It is also about an intensified experience, a *Gesamterlebnis,* that is formed by a careful synthesis, resulting in a more complete sense of, for example, exposure, openness, enclosedness or embrace. We see this at the pavilions in Hombroich Museum Insel, Kolumba Museum in Cologne and the architectural intervention in Fort Roovere of the West-Brabantse Waterlinie. Lastly, contextuality is about introducing a more gradual, easy-going and emphatic transition between a place (be it landscape and/or building) and its surroundings, which we find at the two villas designed by Mies van der Rohe in Krefeld, and the gradients of nature in the series of exterior spaces at Abbey Roosenberg.

Program

Applying these conclusions and departing from the Amaliahoeve's core values, we can now draft the outlines of the program for the *bezinnings*-landscape in the Biesbosch.

At Slangenburg, I have experienced first-hand how it can take a while before one reaches a mental state that is open to *bezinning*. It is important to enable visitors to immerse themselves for several days, to move out of everyday rhythms and 'root' in their new environment and its slower pace. The program of a guest house caters to this requirement, but it is important that it answers to the different preferences and needs of its visitors, providing moments of collectivity and moments of privacy. In theory, someone who is lonely in everyday life should have the option to be among others throughout his stay, while it should also be possible to talk to hardly anyone. Target groups will vary widely, the common ground is a love for nature and the need for tranquillity and serenity. Additionally, it is important that the guest house is available to anyone despite their

financial means. Roughly, the program of the guest house could consist of:

- Private bedrooms and collective dorms;
- Places to meet, such as a living room, a large fireplace and dining rooms;
- Places to withdraw (mentally and physically), such as meditation rooms and small seating nooks;
- Places to study, such as a library;
- Places to actively and passively interact with the landscape, such as a vegetable garden, an outdoor workshop or meditation terraces.
- Functional spaces, such as kitchens, bathrooms and staff offices.

Important intangible characteristics are the presence of and physical connection with surrounding nature, the overall atmosphere of serenity and tranquillity, the availability of various degrees of privacy and collectivity, and a sequence of soothing and more intense moments.

Next to guests, the Amaliapolder already welcomes day trippers, especially in summer. The farm takes in a unique position in the landscape of the Zuidwaard. It is one of the last complete complexes that remains here and is of national importance as a heritage site. It would be a shame if the farm complex is entirely out of bounds to other Biesbosch visitors. The program could include a place where short-term visitors can learn about the farm's history and admire its architecture. Such a place might be a small shop, a class and workshop room or a summer café. The possibilities of embedding these two very different groups of visitors have to be researched further during the design process.

The landscape of the Zuiderklip lends itself to more than just a guest house. The interconnected dikes and *griend* paths wind through polder planes and dense woodlands, forming an orchestrated route that leads the visitor through various settings. Speckled along it are structures and events that highlight the characteristics of the landscape – such as the *griendketen*, the viewing platform and agricultural remnants – and places and events that are still asking for a highlighting gesture. These gestures can differ in program, size, complexity and atmosphere, ranging from a small bench to a yoga pavilion for example, allowing all to find a place that suits their preferences. It is conceivable that the guest house spreads out along this route, providing those who look to withdraw or be even more connected with nature with small huts or even camping grounds.

Lastly, the Amaliahoeve presents several technical challenges: there are no electricity nets or drinking water and sewage systems, nor paved roads. Materials and tools have to be delivered over water. The existing construction has to be calculated and cracks and subsidence damage to be considered.

Together, the conclusions from the theoretical framework and case studies, the core values and key features of the site and the outlines of the program will be valuable input for the design process, which will in turn likely inspire returns, adjustments and additions to the material of this report.

REFLECTION

It feels somewhat premature to reflect on the process and outcomes of this project, for I am still very much in the middle of it. However, fine-tuning this report and taking the first steps in designing, I have come to several realisations:

- As a designer, I work best through research (an '*onderzoekend ontwerper*' we would call this in Dutch). Intently studying and first-hand experiencing a place or building allows me to grasp and dissect its features and essence, providing both the tools and the abilities to then design an intervention that could fit and enhance those features.
- This project has altered the way I look at and think about architecture and landscape. It has opened my eyes to the importance of a people- and experience-focussed approach. This new knowledge has inspired me to experience places differently, to be more open to first impressions and sensory perceptions, and to the effect they have on me and on others.
- Compared to courses and design processes I have done before, this research process felt slightly unstructured, reflected perhaps by the intermezzos and side tracks in this report. However, I do feel like this freedom has resulted in a widening of my scope and, in the end, a somewhat more straightforward conclusion that are proving valuable in my design process. At first, the large amount of prerequisites were overwhelming, and I could only move forward by temporarily shedding all of them. However, all design concepts I came up with felt empty, uninspired and random. Slowly, I returned to the conclusions in this report, embedding them one by one in my line of thought. It started to make more and more sense, until finally, in a sort of inexplicable moment, it felt right. In a way, this reflects my research process.
- Reflecting on my research process itself, I would have liked to include more practical, 'real-life' input. Speaking with fellow guests at Hombroich, my visit to Slangenburg and the small set of one-question interviews with friends and fellow guests provided very valuable insights, and, more importantly, the chance to relate my personal and theoretical conclusions to the experiences and opinions of others. This can be expanded further during the upcoming months of designing.

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Figures

Section A

A1: Retrieved from: https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/SK-A-2390

A2: Retrieved from: https://www.hawkstoneparkfollies.co.uk/gallery

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APPENDIX 1

Value assessment

Based on the guidelines for historical analysis of buildings, building archaeologist Johan van den Eijnden has applied four categories in his assessment of the three components of the Amaliahoeve ensemble (August 2018):

1 High heritage value (blue): conservation advised. If alteration is necessary, use the building's historical value as guiding principle.
2 Positive heritage value (green): conservation desired, alterations are possible when aiming to maintain or reinforce the historical value and architecture of the building.
3 Indifferent heritage value (yellow): alterations are possible, conservation is not necesserily desired
4 Indifferent disturbing heritage value (red): conservation is not desired. This category is not applied to any of the components by Van den Eijnden

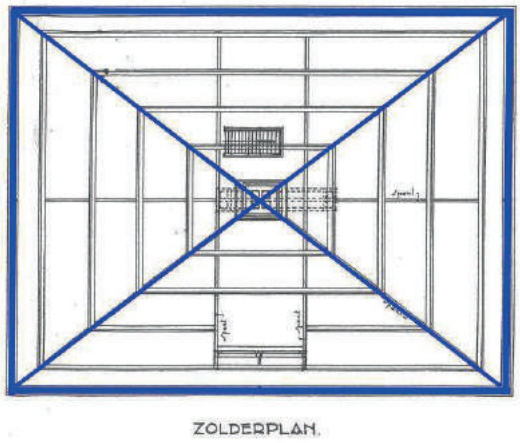

Fig. X.4 – Value assessment of attic floor of tenant's house

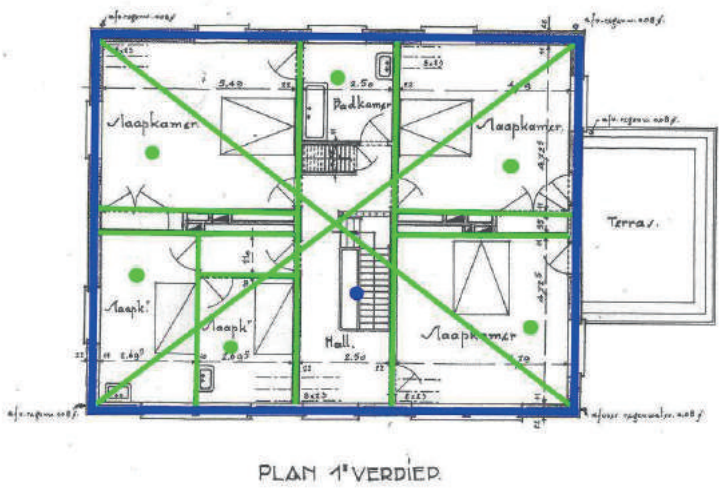

Fig. X.3 – Value assessment of first floor of tenant's house

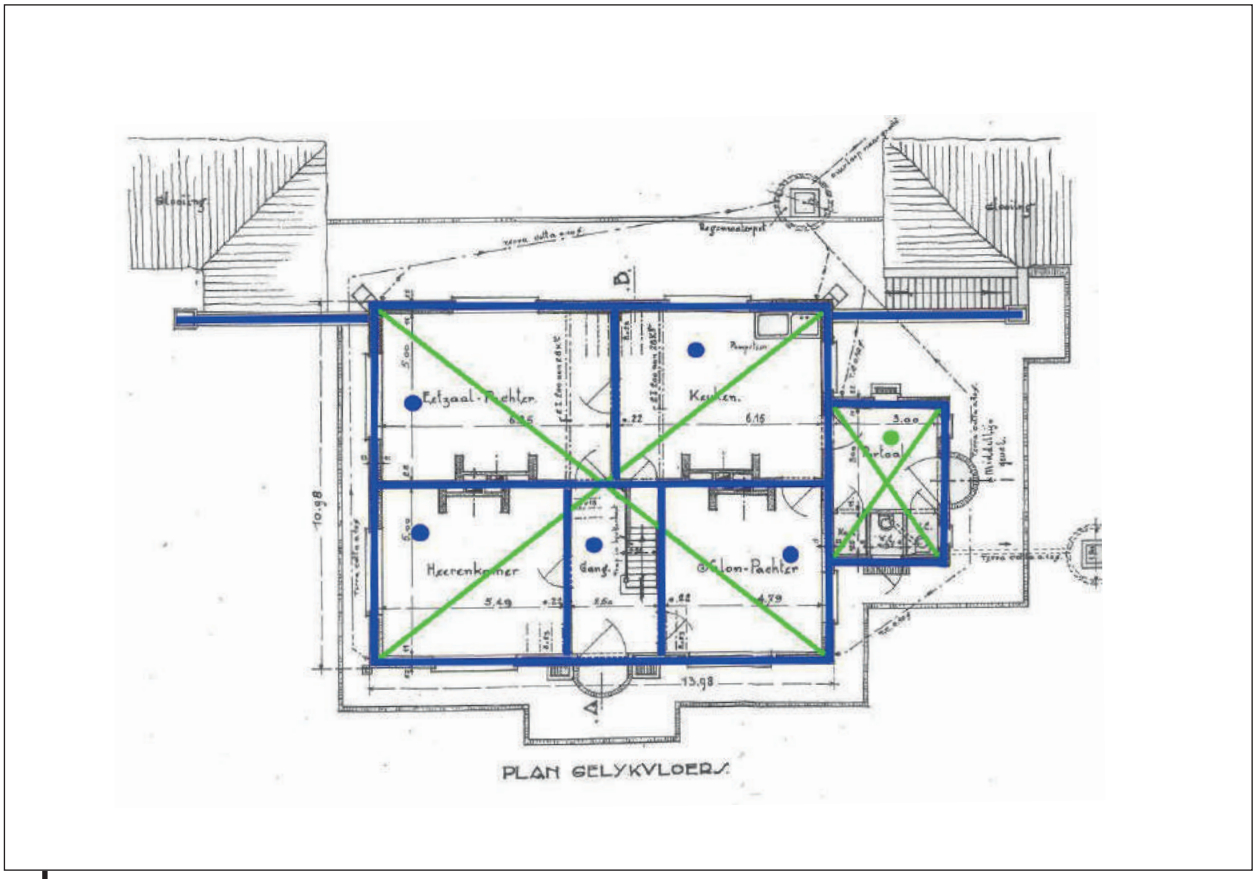

Fig. X.2 – Value assessment of ground floor of tenant's house

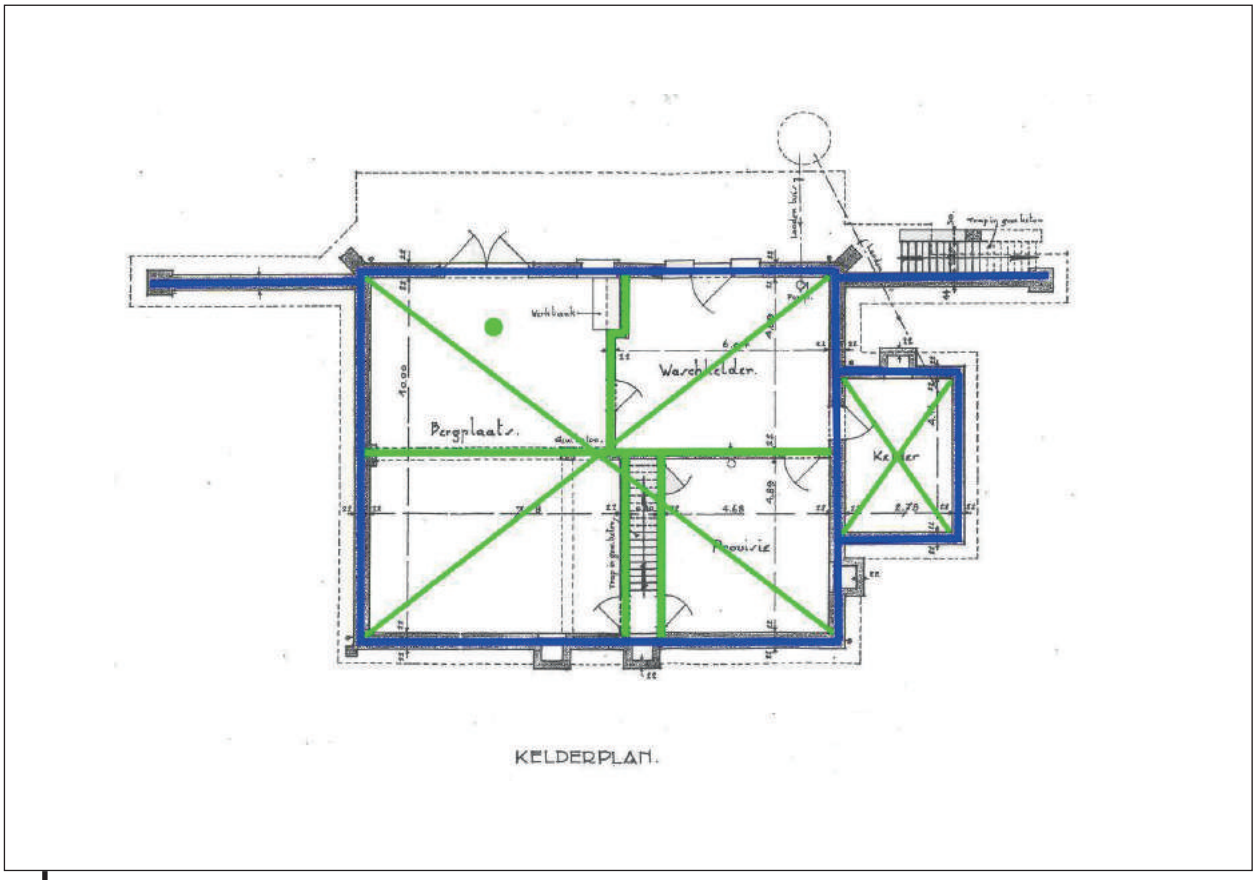

Fig. X.1 – Value assessment of basement of tenant's house

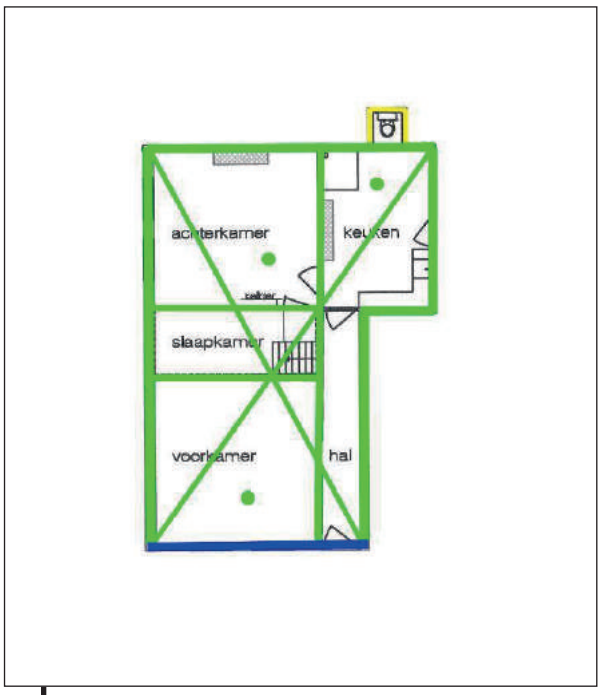

Fig. X.5 – value assessment of ground floor of worker's cottage

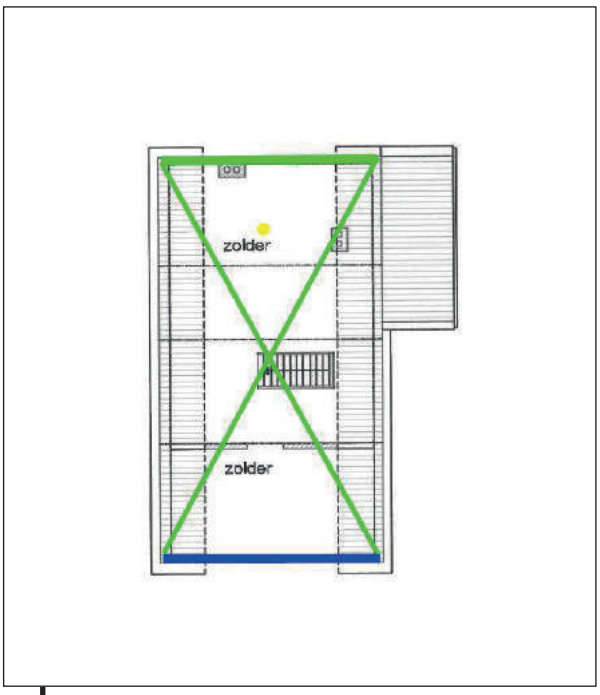

Fig. X.6 – value assessment of first floor of worker's cottage

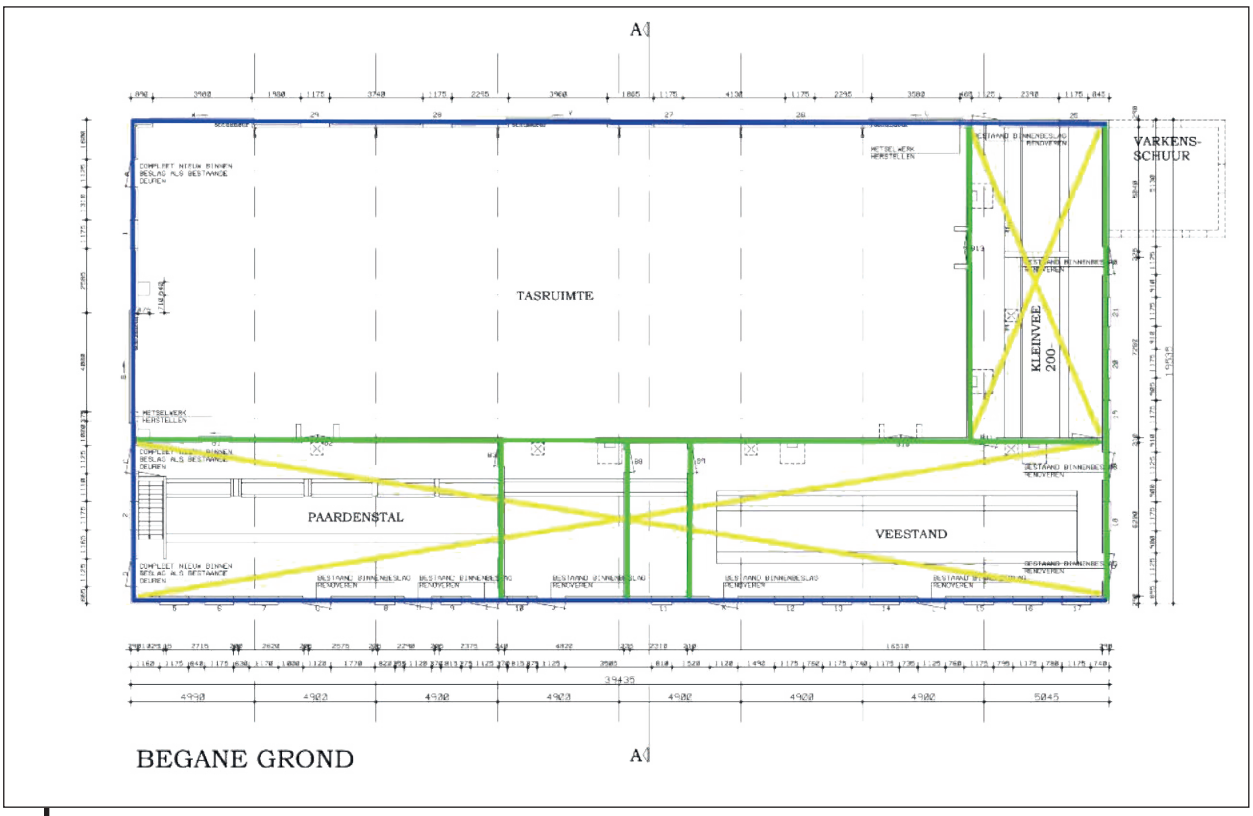

Fig. X.7 – value assessment of ground floor of barn

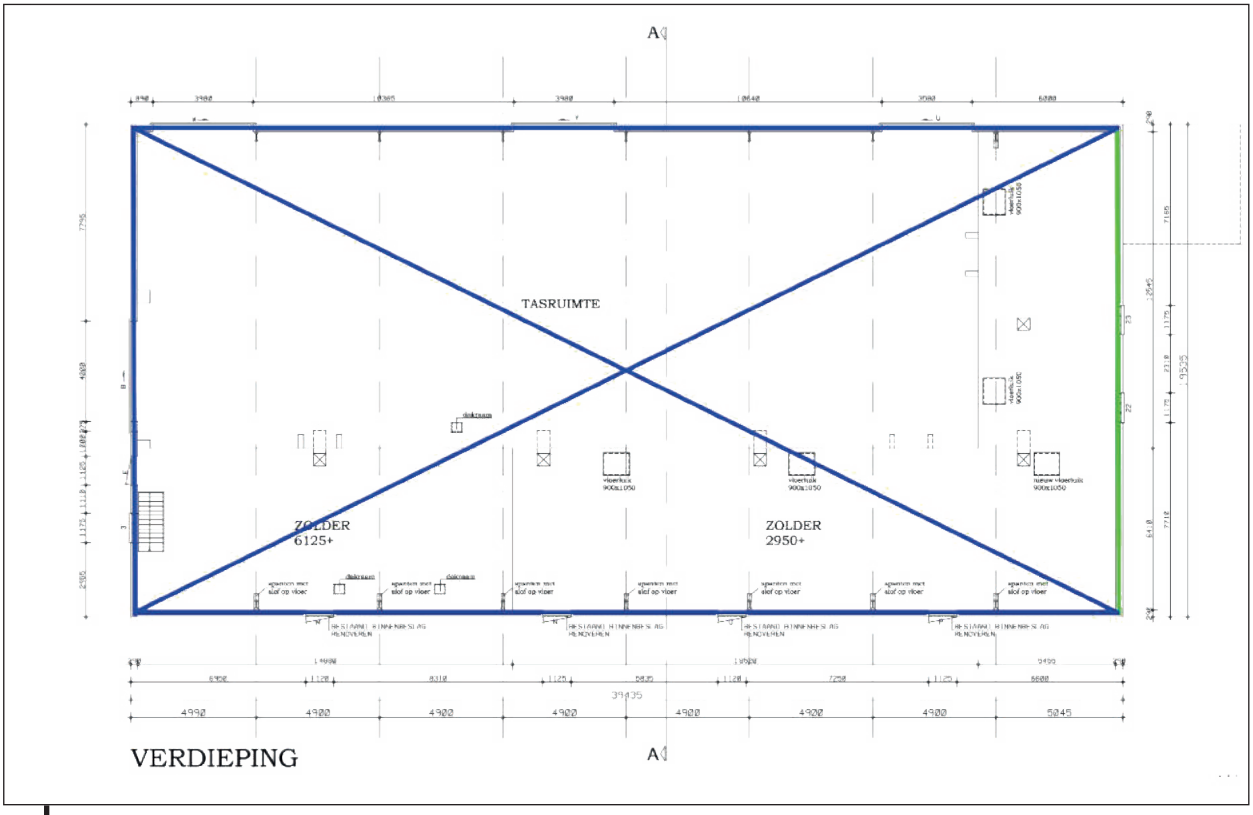

Fig. X.8 – value assessment of roof of barn