

REFLECTION

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*Hent uut 't Zaand.* Archief Jac. Gazenbeekstichting

## Hent uut 't Zaand

*Vlak bij de zanden ligt, ver van alle wereldsche rumoer, de eenzame hut van Hent. Hoe ze eigenlijk heet, ben ik niet te weten kunnen komen. Oud en jong uit de naburige dorpen en gehuchten kent de oude vrouw alleen onder de naam "Hent uut 't Zaand". En ook zal men u wel terecht brengen als ge vraagt naar 't Zandvrouwtje. Zij is al oud, zeer oud geworden op den schralen Veluwegrond. Zeven-en-tachtig jaar! En nog is zij flink en gezond, alleen een beetje slecht ter been. Zoo was het tenminste verleden jaar, toen ik haar met den fotograaf een bezoek bracht. Toen wij de zandverstuivingen ongeveer een uur lang doorworsteld hadden en eenige rust zochten in de luwte der dennenbosschen, bemerkte ik plotseling de hut, half verscholen in de sparren; inderdaad een armzalig menschen-verblijf.*

*Een dak van heideplaggen; de wanden van half rotte planken en oude metselsteenen, gestut door ruw afgehakte boomstammen! De nog talrijke reten en scheuren dichtgestopt met helm en heistruiken!*

*De ramen... O, lezer, maak u geen weidsche voorstellingen van Hent's ramen... die bestaan uit groenige, gebarsten broeikasruitjes, zeer onvoldoende vastgehouden in hunne sponningen van glaskisten- of Vitelloplankjes.*

*Scheef en gebrekkig hangt de lage deur in hare hengsels en het ter afsluiting dienende touwtje biedt ons geen weerstand. Toen wij het armzalige woninkje binnentraden, was de oude bewoonster er niet. In de verte, bij den waterput, die een groene oase geleeke in de bruine heide, bemerkte ik haar plotseling met een emmer. Ze haalde water, en kwam, zo snel hare oude benen haar veroorloofden, aandribbelen, waarschijnlijk op ons opmerkzaam gemaakt door het vreeselijke tekeergaan van den hond achter het huisje. "Of wij d'r hut op een prentje mochten zetten?" O, ja dat mocht wel, "de heere moste mer d'r gang gaon". Maar d'r eigest bie op" dat kostte ons eenige overredingskracht; het Veluwse volk is wantrouwend, vooral jegens dingen die ze niet kennen, zooals onze camera.*

*Een kwartje deed echter wonderen, en zoo komt het, dat ik den lezers en lezeressen van Buiten met het "Zandvrouwtje" in kennis kan stellen. Ook fotografeerden wij haar nog 'n keer bij haar waterleiding, den put in de hei. Zelfs een pomp bezat het schepsel niet! En toen inviteerde ze ons nog op 'n kom koffie, wilde in al hare armoede toch nog de plichten der gastvrouw waarnemen. Wij wilden haar echter niet ontriefen, en zetten ons daarom bij haar op de eenvoudige zodenbank voor de stulp. En daar vertelde de oude vrouw ons van haar lief en leed, gedurende die lange reeks van jaren ondervonden. Vooral van leed. Hoe soms, bij felle stormen, het zand opstooft tot halverwege de ramen en alles; koffie, suiker en andere eetwaren, vermengd was met de fijne korreltjes. Dat was geen watersnood, maar "zandnood".*

*Ze verhaalde ons van haar groote eenzaamheid, hoe er niet zelden weken voorbij gingen, dat ze niemand zag, hoe ze vroeger altijd zoo bang was geweest voor ziekten, omdat de dichtstbijzijnde dokter toch nog altijd op meer dan een uur afstand woonde. Ja, dat voelden we, dat moesten wel moeilijke tijden geweest zijn voor de arme heidebewoners. Ik zeg bewoners, want Hent was getrouwd geweest, en heeft een zoon. Die zoon leeft nog, een ongelukkige, gebochelde, kromme persoonlijkheid en toch, de eenige steun voor de oude Hent! Hij was “de schaop an ’t heujhe” en in de verte zagen we hem over de heide sukkelen met zijn elf dieren. Rijk waren ze tegenwoordig; elf schapen...! Neen lezer, lach niet, en trek uwe schouders niet medelijdend op, ik herhaal het, Hent en Jan zijn rijk. Met ’n stuk of wat kippen, ’n varken en ’n paar schapen zijn ze den moeilijken tocht door het leven begonnen.*

*Gij ziet, de eenvoudige Veluwsche boer heeft niet veel noodig en indien hij na lange jaren van noeste vlijt en ijzeren volharding slechts de voldoening mag smaken, zijn harden arbeid door een gelukkigen, rustigen ouden dag zonder zorg bekroond te zien, dan is zijn hoogste ideaal bereikt. Vergeet niet, dat de meesten als “scheper” (schaapherder) beginnen. Hun levensbehoeften zijn weinige. Hent’s heele huis bijvoorbeeld bevat slechts één vertrek en in de grootst mogelijke eendracht leeft zij daar met haar vee in dezelfde kamer, die tegelijkertijd dient voor eetzaal, slaapkamer, gang, vestibule, keuken enzovoort.*

*Wat heeft de oude vrouw met haar man lang en zwaar geworsteld en gestreden tegen het zand! Eerst nu, na jarenlange strijd, heeft zij een klein stukje bouw- en weiland veroverd op de Veluwsche zandzee. “Jao”, zei ze, “arg best is de grond hier niet, en je mot soms hard tobben um tegen de wienter ’n bietje eerpels(aardappelen) en rog binnen te kriege. Mer we hen ’t al zoo lang geboerd, dat we ’t veerder ok nog wel zulle schikke”. De oude ziel spreekt nog van “veerder”, denkt wellicht nog lange jaren te zullen leven, en is toch al bijna negentig!*

*Reeds kleurde het avondrood de toppen der sparren en schonk een groot gevoel van vrede en rust aan ons, wereldsche menschen. Wij namen afscheid van Hent, en vroegen haar nog den naasten weg naar Wekerom. Met breede armgebaren wees ze ons de weg: “Beste is nog, da’je zoo mer dwars deur ’t zaand heenbaojt, ’t is nogal niet dreug, anders kan ’t er soms lillek bodden(stuiven)”. Bijzonder lachte die wandeling ons bij avond echter niet toe en daarom wees ze ons een pad door de dennen, “dat eigenlijk nog richter was ok”. De arme-rijke hutbewoonster, die in haar nederige stulp, ver weg van de woelige wereld, waarvan zij de zorgen niet kent, zeker tevredener leeft dan vele groote stadsmenschen, was nog langen tijd het hoofdonderwerp van ons gesprek op den eenzamen weg. Zij zal haar hut, haar vrij uitzicht over de bruine heide, die haar lief geworden is, en bovenal haar tevredenheid niet willen ruilen voor het slavenbestaan van een stads-sleurmensch in zijn nauwe, bedompte bovenwoning.*

*Wigman, A. (1910). Hent uut ’t Zaand. Jac. Gazenbeekstichting.*





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## **[I The progression of the research towards a design intention]**

The project is an expression of a personal fascination with the phenomenon of play, which was generated by watching my little nephews and nieces grow up over the years. Observing them made me realise how there is a lack of play in my life as an adult, but also how the capitalist society of the 21st century offers no space for play as it encourages seriousness not spontaneity. As an architecture student I was particularly interested in what architecture for play could be and look like and more specifically how architecture can be morphed or made to provoke the act of play in a much broader context than a play park created for kids.

The first thing that needs to be acknowledged regarding the topic of play is what architecture can and cannot do. During the research it became more and more clear that in order for the act of play to arise, much more than the mere appearance of the architecture, as memory and culture play an important role in the emergence of physical play. However, architecture can still take on a facilitating role through poetic, sensitive and non-rational qualities that can be reflected in a design of a space. The first design idea proposed in this graduation project regarded a series of small pavilions, maybe even follies, for people to physically interact with. During the first phase of the research, the main search was discovering what this 'new architecture' could be and appear as, yet when exploring this topic more in depth it became clear that it was more relevant to study existing places where play arises in order to thoroughly unravel what the specific qualities, in the form of architectural characteristics, of these places are. It would provide a more meaningful understanding of these places instead of more superficial ideas of 'innovative' architecture, as being able to test the appearance of play takes a long time to understand, due to the psychological side that it comes with.

The choice to make the research based on various precedent projects provided the opportunity to study these places in a rational way - reading project descriptions and looking closely at floor plans- but also in a non rational way, looking more at what appears and what this brings along; looking at what it triggers rather than what it is. By visiting, photographing, writing about and experiencing various case studies in the Netherlands, I became aware of what is less tangible in architecture than the rational approach to spaces and more about the poetic and sensitive qualities of a space.

It became clear that play is more than just its most banal interpretation and if the focus would lie on a playful experience for adults in particular, it urged a more deep and meaningful approach. From here, the project focussed on the

understanding of places for play in a way broader sense, defining play not as something that has to be physical, but more about play of thought and reflecting, something that has a lower threshold and regards more about the sensitive qualities of a space rather than a rationally perfect environment.

Studying various projects, many differences appear at first glance. However, by looking at them side by side for a longer period of time, similarities became apparent. It is not a question of a literal form, colour or layout, but of overlapping themes that each project presents in its own way. A large pile of information and insights had been recovered, but what is it that stands out the most in a project? By enlarging and explaining the most striking quality of each project studied, a quality that was tangible or had more to do with a feeling or intention, the research became more tactile and the material and immaterial could be brought together. An example of this is the characteristic contrast, which is about contrast in different materials that are placed next to each other, or a building that forms a strong contrast to its surroundings by means of, for example, form language, something that is visible in reality. However, it is also about feeling, namely the feeling that a movement towards different environments that contrast with each other arises.

It is difficult to filter all the information gained from the research into an unequivocal answer, into something that must necessarily be used in a design. A design is about much more than the appearance of a certain element, it is also about the intangible, sensitive qualities of a place, the way the building reacts to its surroundings and in which environment the building will be placed at all. It is important to state that triggering play is therefore not only about what the project is in itself, but most importantly what feeling it evokes within its visitor.

As the research progressed, my perspective changed in what the design and its accompanying programme should be and do; arguing play is not only something about physical interaction with an object, but as something sensitive, personal, not necessarily a physical image in reality but something of the imagination. As something that is sensitive to people and the environment, something that is about a deep experience of a place rather than a superficial event. The design should be a place that could evoke the experience of play through a deep, bodily interaction of space; liberated from banal ideas and searching for poetic qualities. The search for a suitable place for a design is therefore already of great importance for the translation of the design, whereby the place and the design could be inspired by each other, and the journey to this place is also of importance.

## II The intuitive method in contrast to a rational tradition

During the research, it was necessary not to only look at project descriptions, images from the internet and architectural drawings but also visit as many places as possible, in order to capture the intangible of a place, something that cannot be deduced from photographs alone. I did, however, try to capture the feelings that arose while reading and looking closely at the project, in order to subsequently 'test' these during the visit as far as possible.

By looking and feeling carefully during the research, the gap between the research and the design is eventually narrowed, because a feeling emerges for what the project should become, how it should unfold. During the years of studying architecture at TU Delft, we noticed that reason is often taken as the starting point of the design process, but also as the method to arrive at an end product, in order to then be able to rationally explain this end product.

Taking a feeling, experience or ambition as a starting point and exploring it in an intuitive way is something that hardly occurs in both Bachelor education and Master education. This intuition-driven project is therefore also about unlearning certain design habits that have become normal over the years, letting go of rational assumptions in order to start from a feeling and ultimately allowing this feeling to shine through in the entire design, both the renderings and the technical detail. An 'over-developed' ratio makes it a whole new, exciting road to go down, but also exciting and full of inspiration and surprises. Fear must be put aside; during the research, I was open to all possible options, and the design process did not start with an image of what the architecture should be, but the feeling it would hopefully bring about.

It's about students choosing a place and then really looking at what this place needs, what could be appropriate here. For example, is wood, which often is imported from elsewhere, a suitable material to build with in a Dutch city when there are many residual streams of stone-like materials, among others? The internet is full of gravel tiles that can be picked up for free, do foundations need to be poured new or is there another possibility to be found in the area? It is a quest for nuance in the debate of what is sustainable, only by the simple act of looking carefully.

I had to rediscover my design process this year, in order to make it personal and my own. In these months, I have discovered my way of working, which helps me to better define how I design and what I stand for as a designer. I found out that for me it's about looking, experiencing and feeling, and then translating these findings into models and sketches that simultaneously touch different scales. The modelling/drawing in the computer joins in later in the

process, to prevent that in the 'creative' sketch phase of the design, parameters that are beyond one's control are not immediately holding you back. When I build models and observe them properly, I trusted more and more that I would see what the right design move was, how undefined this right might sound. It has been a learning process to be able to dare to trust your own capabilities to design through intuition again.

### **[III Design as a continuing reflective process]**

Although the research mainly takes place in the first half of the year, the time when the design slowly starts to get going, the two certainly influenced each other during the year, both ways. The research gave architectural expressions that could possibly bring about a form of play and at the same time brought to light that play is not just a physical activity, following, the design ensured that the definition and interpretation of what play also could be is, became more substantial. Although the two components each used their own method, with the research seeking a more rational structuring of findings as opposed to the design which was guided more by intuition and more free ideas, the boundary between the two became blurred in the design process. All knowledge gained during the research was continuously present during the design process, so it was not necessary to consciously look back all the time to see if all elements were present. The research acted as a stepping stone for elements that could be used in the design and only then got real meaning, directly copying examples would not work because of the insensitivity with which these would be introduced in a particular place. It was looking at what the place needs and how architecture for play can respond to that and not starting from an idea of what I want to make and dropping a building somewhere.

As the more rational research contained a more intuitive side, the intuitive design process became more rational towards the end of the project; reflecting on what had been produced, the characteristics of the designed project could be traced back to the research and the design therefore became more solid and coherent. This is where the two parts really melted together, explained as a whole in the final presentation.

#### [IV Design project]

The presented design is a continuous moment of pause after a series of different investigations through different scales and themes. It has been a process that eventually not only regarded play in architecture, but also touched the topic of sensitivity in that what has been made and what its attitude is in relation to its direct surrounding. It became a search for a design that reflected the essence of the place with honesty and would, through architectural interventions, provoke a sense of wonder on what has been constructed.

The Hoge Veluwe National Park is a place where a form of play takes place without the visitor realising it. The ever-changing landscapes with their special flora and fauna intrigue people time and again. However, the truth is that behind the scenes people are working with all their strength and will to preserve the landscape how it is today and even reverse some of mother nature's advances. As an example, the sandy plains must be actively maintained so that they are not overgrown by heathland or pine forest. However, the cultivated landscape has more to offer as culture and nature have come together on this location for decades. Throughout the park remnants can be found, each representing a certain time and giving a glimpse of how it once was through objects like foundations of Het Groote Museum, various bunkers from the second world war and the Orientation Table used for hunting purposes. The introduction of architecture into this landscape is therefore not strange and unusual, although one must be aware of their attitude as a designer towards the fragile environment which is currently suffering enormously.

The programme placed within the park is split up in 3 different elements, a place to stay, a sanctuary and an object to enhance the experience of the walking route. It is not architecture that takes up a lot of surface area, deals with the ground in a conscious manner, but juxtaposes the human interventions on the different locations, providing an intense experience of place as well as triggering the playful mind.

The overarching theme that connects the three objects touches on both culture and nature; the construction of buildings that make the passage of time visible through the concept of decay. It responds to both the character of the site and the sense of wonder; the ruins that carry the architecture will change with every passing moment. The architecture will come to life while nature will absorb it slowly, without the need for time to pause. Perhaps the climax of the architecture is the moment in which form and nature are in complete balance with each other, not the second after hammering in the last dowel. Great importance lied in the question how to construct while understanding local resources and the process of

decay, along with the more rational questions of transporting all the materials to the site.

The future ruins not only serve as a literal support for the architecture, they are also something that can be constructed with each other and even with personal (stone or ceramic) possessions. In this way, the architecture not only becomes part of the park, but also part of its visitors. Furthermore, it will create an interesting composition in which new elements can be discovered again and again. At first, the narrow minded design idea was that the stone walls were made with similar brick, however as time went by the residual flows of the park's immediate surroundings became visible, together with the qualities of the park itself where rocks in different shapes, colours and sizes are to be found. It revealed that the beauty and intrigue lies in the distinctions between the different stones from the site, demolished nearby buildings, malformed or botched bricks from nearby brick factories. Lime mortar will serve as a binding agent between the different stories of each stone to be found in the façade. With this idea and principle as a basis, I can imagine that over time the objects along various routes in the national park can be constructed, to eventually be overgrown by nature; a symbiosis between nature and culture.

[V Architectural translation as a renewed design attitude in a rigid environment]

In today's society where stress and pressure prevails, the counterpart has become increasingly important. One must make time to relax, to play again, although it is exactly this play that is considered as something for children. However, the situation as it is now is untenable; the number of burn-outs, depressions and overworked students has never been so high. Architecture cannot directly change behaviour, but it can play a facilitating role by creating space where can be triggered and might arise. It is important though, that play is not only a physical activity, but also a mental one. Whether adults, the target group that perhaps needs it most at the moment, still want to hang on the climbing frame or swing is of course questionable. The project shows that play can also be interpreted in a different, less banal way and translated into an environment-sensitive design. Academically, the research offers a first grounding in certain architecture that moves people, but much further research is needed to make this apparently elusive phenomenon more tangible. The project should therefore not be a direct example, but an interpretation and representation of a possibility that will hopefully (re)awaken people's interest in and awareness of this subject, as was the case in the post-war period.

The experience of architecture in a certain place can be achieved without undermining the qualities of the place, the project shows. It is something that can go together, one does not exclude the other. The project is therefore not about showing a new architectural tricks or gimmicks, but exposes the sensitive qualities of a place, looking at what the place has to offer and not what man has to offer in the place. It regards the topic of decay, because if time keeps on going, why should architecture stop when it is supposedly finished? The design is something that is allowed to come into being, but also to be given back to nature, where it will only leave overgrown traces of time. It shows people that things can be done differently, that architecture is not stagnant, that as a designer it is not about delivering a perfectly clean end product, but as something that changes through time and especially is allowed to change through time. It seems that today, are not take time anymore, as if architecture should be fixed in time, a reflection of pause, a standstill.

The projects also aims to shows a new attitude towards nature, though the idea of inviting nature in the built is not new. In the past, people built with respect for the environment, nature and its animals were part of what was built, and the boundary between them was virtually non-existent. Birds nested under the roof, plants crawled on the façade where the insects nestled again; flora and fauna were part of the whole. The project shows that it is possible to build with these ideas



even in our time, how culture and nature can become part of the building process and the built but above all, that not every architecture is benign when there is mutual respect between form and nature.

I therefore believe that a designer has the responsibility to make the qualities of the place visible, while respecting the natural processes. Awareness of and possibilities in imperfection of architecture. Through making natural processes visible awareness is created which, in my opinion, is a first step towards a re-differentiation in the attitude that man takes with regard to nature here in the west, where this connection has been lost through prosperity.

#### [VI **Explorelab as breeding ground for (personal) renaissance**]

The Explorelab studio provides space to the development of architecture from a personal fascination. This creates a group of people with very different project topics and very different ways of researching and designing. For me personally, the studio offered the opportunity to further develop my fascination with play, derived from playing with and observing my little nephews and niece, into a research and architecture project, entirely in my own way. The theme was not fixed, as is the case in other graduation studios, thus complete freedom to develop as one's own project.

The methodological framework for both the research and the design is not fixed and is almost something that has to be designed as well, looking at personal interests and qualities. The responsibility for your own project has never been so big in any of the studios. This can be uncomfortable at times; your process is so individual that you can't compare it with anyone else's. Everyone has different tutors who have different expectations for, say, a p3 presentation, which is why it is important to agree with your tutors what has to be there and not to let the different stories around you make you crazy. For me personally, choosing my own tutors has been one of the nicest aspects of the whole Explorelab process; you get the chance to work with people who inspire you and can guide you where necessary, but also give the space to explore things and understand that not every week can be top production. At the end of the day, the project is so unique that you feel responsible for it and take the responsibility for working hard to make it a success.

During the process, you often come up against yourself, not only as a designer, but also as a human being. There are bound to be times when you get stuck and peers who are not fully engaged in your project can give you difficult feedback. At the same time, you learn to reflect more critically and to deal with the feelings of uncertainty and frustration that arise when you get stuck. You fulfil the role of designer as well as coordinator of the whole and you have to motivate yourself to keep going when things get tough. But all of this has taught me so much personally, especially about my way of thinking, designing and above all, position as a designer, where the tutors do not overrule the project but guide you on the path that you yourself are walking.

Even with the stressful final weeks approaching, I am grateful for the process that I have been able to go through this year. A special thanks to Peter, Wing and Matthijs for the wonderful conversations, continuous inspiration and motivation

