

REALISE AND KNOW IN ORDER TO WONDER AGAIN

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KABK INSIDE

Theroy and Writing with Anne Hoogewoning

01.2021

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It is a sunny and a windy day in Den Haag. The first meeting for studio II and everybody is curious about the new project to work on. The meeting is in front of a 17th century mansion located at a former canal right in the city centre which I pass by every time before going to school. There is a graphic museum inside, but it used to be a private building: it was the home of a wealthy family whose surname was certainly known to all at the time: Dedel¹.

The tour has started and I'm walking into the museum with my classmates, my teachers and one of the owners, who kindly shows us around. Honestly, from the outside, I couldn't imagine how beautiful the interior is. There are so many rooms, each one different from the next and, from the way the furniture is arranged and the design of the wallpaper, you can see that each one has its own specific function, like the hallway, the dining room, the living room, the studio, the servant room, and so on. On the first floor, the wallpaper tends to be dark, with various natural details drawn on it. Some, according to the museum owner, come from Japan.

And the tour continues, going towards the basement where the atmosphere changes to become more grey and bare: the rooms are devoid of decorative details, you can see the exposed structure, showing that this is a functional area and that no one will ever go to see it and therefore it does not need attention. Is the area where the servants worked and prepared food.

We then continue to the first floor, where the most private area of the family, the bedrooms, are located. the atmosphere is always rich in detail and the rooms are high. Only the colours remain lighter and on the floor, as you come up the stairs, there are stars drawn. An atmosphere of purity and care.

The house is so full of wonders that it will certainly be difficult to choose a theme to work on.



Wooden water collector in the attic of the Dedel house.

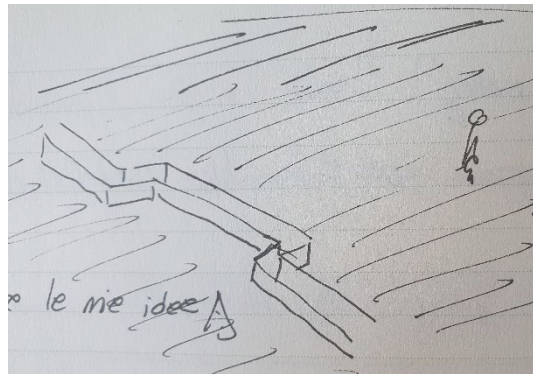
After visiting the bedrooms, the owner invites us to climb a wooden spiral staircase that was hidden behind a door. The staircase is quite small, one person can walk up it uncomfortably. We find ourselves in the attic,

- ¹ <https://designmuseumdedel.nl/en/huis-dedel/about-huis-dedel/>

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a rather dark but large space as big as the entire surface of the house. This is also a spoliated space with a wooden structure and exposed concrete walls. In fact it was the place where the servants slept. But not only that: while the owner was proudly telling us about his future plans to buy neighbouring buildings and put up elevators, he said at one point: “this is where the servants slept ... and this it was used for collecting the water to make the laundry” pointing to a wooden canal, which is about 60 cm above the ground, entering from the outside of the building on the south side, just below a particular round window, which overlooks the main road that used to be a canal.

I’m totally caught by this almost hidden, ordinary, abandoned, utensil, a small beautiful and functional, architectural treasure preserved on the attic at the far, top floor of the mansion and I decided immediately what to work on.



Only me and the water rain roof collector.

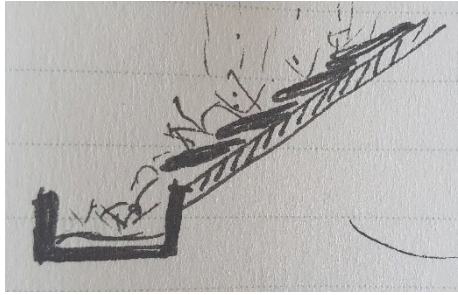
It’s 1670, the sky is grey and it’s windy. It’s cold and in the street only the servants, with their light clothes, are walking along the canal to do some commissioning for their employers. Some of them are delivering secret letters to secret people, some go to the market to get some food and others are washing the clothes in the canal.

In the family Dedel’s home everything is in its place, everything emanates well-being and wealth. In the chimneys, 4 on each floor to be precise, the fire is going. It’s warm. In the basement, which is warmed only by the cook fire and the stove, 4 servants are running to prepare an abundant dinner for an important art collector who wants to sell a rare art piece to Mister Dedel. On the first floor, the four children are finishing their private lessons while other 3 servants are cleaning and reordering their rooms. And in the attic, everything is silence.

It’s another day, in 1670, it’s morning and the sky is grey. In the basement the servants are preparing breakfast for Dedel’s family, on the ground floor Mister Dedel is writing an important letter to the court for the defence of his client², while on the first floor the four children are still sleeping. And in the attic: there still silence.

² - <https://designmuseumdedel.nl/en/huis-dedel/about-huis-dedel/>

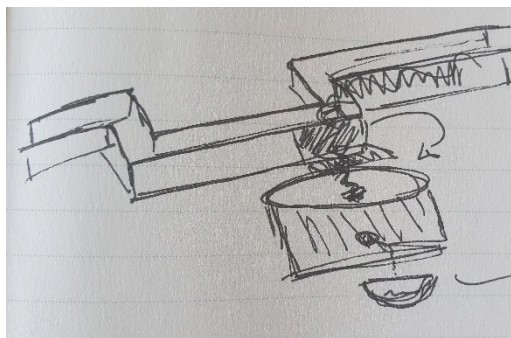
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“...The rain that is falling fastly on the rooftop, making all this beautiful noise, tic, tac, tic-tic-tic, tac, it slips into in an unusual water collector ...”

Looking out from the window, there are some raindrops that start to fall down from the sky. It's time.

In the basement two servants clean the dishes, on the ground floor Mister Dedel is still working on his letter, on the first floor the four children are playing pirates together. And in the attic? Silence is turning into the sound of rain and with it the sound of footsteps increase, becoming louder and faster. The magic is starting: a modest and humble space, with exposed wooden beams, usually empty and silent during the days, fills with sounds, colours and movement. The rain that is falling fastly on the rooftop, making all this beautiful noise, tic, tac, tic-tic-tic, tac, it slips into in an unusual water collector positioned on the outside of the building, right at the beginning of the rooftop on the south side of the building. Suddenly, the rainwater, takes a diversion and finds itself inside the house, and falls into a big wooden container, filling it up and be available for laundry.



“...Suddenly, the rainwater, takes a diversion and finds itself inside the house, and falls into a big wooden container, filling it up and be available for laundry...”

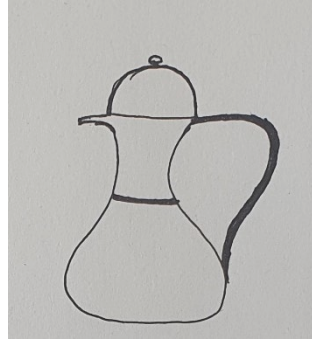
Here Adelheid, the oldest and most capable servant, is using the traditional Marabout³, for taking the water from the big container and putting it into a smaller one, where the clothes are going to soak for three to four hours. In the meantime, Eline who's only 15 and has just been recruited by the dedel, is dividing the clothes and then put them into the water Adelheid has prepared. She knows it is better to divide colored clothes from white ones and divide them again from dirty to very dirty ones to support the process of washing.

After four hours of soaking Eline and Adelheid turns back into the attic and start the rinsing part with warm water. Adelheid prepares the fire and Eline is throwing away the old water to refill the containers with new

³ a soft feathery fluffy material prepared from turkey feathers or the coverts of marabouts and used especially for trimming women's hats or clothes. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/marabou>.

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hot water that will be heated inside the Marabout over the fire which Adelheid prepared with great speed and confidence. By now she knows how this ritual works.



Marabout

The rising is always taking a lot of time, but in the meanwhile, Adelheid and Eline, are talking and sharing some secrets while humming and washing.

Adelheid: "How happy I am that Mr Dedel called that Italian architect. They sound like good friends..."

Eline: "Yes, me too. I get tired just imagining having to go up and down all those stairs to get water!"

Adelheid: "Yeaah... but let's move on to more important things: I saw the way that boy looked at you at the market. Have you seen him again?"

Eline getting red: "Come on! None of your business! ... But, yes, I've seen it again.""

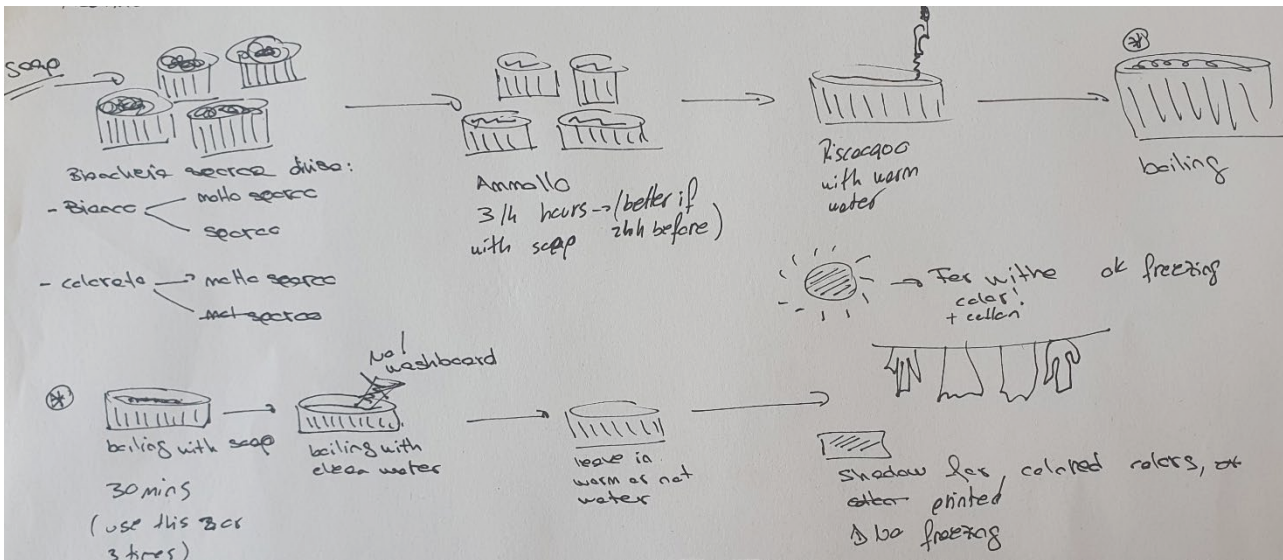
Adelheid: "I kenw it!."

The laundry is still going to take a long time. After the rising, new water must be boiled and then thrown into the rinsed clothes and soaked for 30 minutes with soap. The girls know that this operation is best done 3 times. Then throwing away the old water, boil clean water and let the clothes soak for another 30 minutes in clean water. It's not over yet: the clothes will have to be put in another tank of lukewarm water to get rid of the last remnants of dirt and in order to finally have clean clothes.

The last part of this long process is hanging the clothes. Only the veterans of laundry know that the white clothes should be hung in the sun, so that the colour stays nice and white, while all coloured fabrics should be dried in a shady area. For this drying process, the attic is just perfect.

Eline and Adelheid, already exhausted from all the work they have done so far, give each other the last push and begin to lay out the clothes. And then, finally, after having eaten a snack with a piece of bread, Eline and Adelheid go to sleep with the other servants, one next to the other, in the next room, to keep each other warm. The next day there is still ironing and folding to be done.

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Laundry process sketches

2020, I'm in my room and I'm thinking how fascinating it is to find such a contemporary element of architecture in a house from the 1700s. I wonder if they were the only ones, if indeed, it was as useful as I described in my story for everyday gestures. If so, why didn't they use it anymore? Did they not know how?

In my research, I have not found many answers to these questions, but I have discovered that the system is not new, on the contrary! Already in the domus of ancient Rome, architects played proudly with architecture to bring water into the courtyards and make the room cooler and brighter⁴. I think it is a pity that over the years this sensitivity and pride has been lost.

To be clearer, in the past, but also nowadays in the countries most in need of water, this natural element was venerated, with dances, as for example in ancient Egypt⁵, or through gods as in the Mayan culture⁶, and was only present in the homes of the rich as in the Domus of ancient Rome⁷. Water was therefore recognised as an important and fundamental element, because it was needed, and therefore the focus of attention. And here we come to the point: nowadays we only need to turn the crank on the cold, grey tap at home to have running water wherever we go. That goes without saying. Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful for the technology we have, but a little change needs to be made. If I look around me, I don't see poetry, I don't see decoration, I don't see personality, I see shades of white, shades of grey and if I'm lucky, shades of brown. The most coveted design is made up of lines, the details of construction are hidden and the more the better, I see no truth, no respect and no love, just clones, masks and straight lines destroying and hiding all the charm and magic of anything. Design is just focused on selling the product and not on its function.

And here comes my ultimate goal: to make people see, reconnect and love what surrounds us through my design so that the next time a homeowner sees an architectural element such as a water collector, they will look at it with wonder and know what to do with it.

⁴ <https://www.romanoimpero.com/2017/11/idraulica-romana.html>

⁵ https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danza_della_pioggia

⁶ <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaac>

⁷ <https://www.romanoimpero.com/2017/11/idraulica-romana.html>

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- Edward O. Jenkins, "Laundry Manual" or "Washing Made Easy", New York, 1863.
- Jean-Baptiste Greuze, "The Laundress", Los Angeles, 1761

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- Peter Webber, "Girl with a Pearl Earring", 2003