

The Sur-  
facing  
Archae-  
ology.

*The intangible narrative of the Marine Terrein.*

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*Analogue photo on Marine Terrein, 2021, Own archive.*



*Analogue photo on Marine Terrein, Entrance, 2021, Own archive.*





*Analogue photo on Marine Terrein, Entrance, 2021, Own archive.*



*Analogue photo on Marine Terrein, Entrance, 2021, Own archive.*





*Analogue photo on Marine Terrein, 2021, Own archive.*



*Analogue photo on Marine Terrein, Scheepsvaartmuseum, 2021, Own archive.*

## Introduction.

The Marine Terrein is a man-made island that was used for building ships and as shipping yard for the Admiralty of Amsterdam (1655-1915). The area was closed off to the general public and only accessible to the Navy. However, recently this has changed (2015).

The site is becoming increasingly more accessible to the public and the Navy's presence is diminishing. To facilitate these changes, the site has a total of 4 access points, one of which is still under construction. These have given me different opportunities from which to encounter the terrain during my research.

Increased accessibility on the site has generated many changes to meet the demands of the new users, such as construction of bridges; new signage; demolition of buildings and the arrival of new lodging. New layers such as new infrastructure, image and objects like tables and chairs; but also new perspectives, are added on top of all the layers<sup>1</sup> that are already there. *Why is this necessary? Why can't we use the stories or/and materials from the layers that are already there? How can we build on top of the narrative that already exists instead of replacing it with something new?*

In the book, *Rewriting Architecture*, it is highlighted how we could reuse or appropriate another function for places left behind or derelict.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the book also discusses observing and analyzing a site. Determining what is valuable to work with in the follow-up steps. And how these values complement the space.

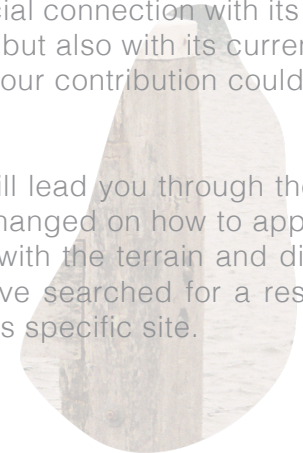
<sup>1</sup> "Layers referring to physical, archaeology, geographical layers as well as non tangible layers which could contribute to a narrative."  
<sup>2</sup> Alkemade, F. van Iersel, M. Ouburg, J. "Tabula Scripta - re-writing architecture." , 2019, Valiz, INTRODUCTION p.21 - p.32.

I take great pleasure in encountering new places, in my capacity as a designer, but also as an "everyday person". When encountering a new place, there are endless, inspiring discoveries to be made. *What is its history? Which materials are used there? Who used this place? How is the environment treated?* These questions and their answers are my sources of information. This was also the case with the Marine Terrein, where my research took place.

Usually, when I enter a new area, I search for objects or materials to take with me to form an image of the place. At the Marine Terrein, I too searched for something tangible, which could be of valuable for the terrain, to explain its history. Something physical I could take with me to symbolize the site. However, my first encounter with the Marine Terrein was not a warm embrace, more of a chilly, impersonal handshake. I could not capture as sense of the site nor could I clarify the historic value of the site.

During my collaboration with my fellow student Ilaria, we approached the site focusing on reconsidering and studying its traces to create a social connection with its (new) users, not only with its history, but also with its current state, to define and explore what our contribution could be to this place.

Within this research paper I will lead you through the process of how my perspective changed on how to approach a site. By familiarizing myself with the terrain and digging into the stories it carries, I have searched for a research method that would best suit this specific site.



I will study an area such as the Marine Terrein from a design perspective using the language of archaeology. Several design related case studies will help to research how to look at what exists already and how that influences our choices by the values we discover and want to retain in the next chapter of a narrative.

I will attempt to reformulate the current definition of archaeology :

***“Researching human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of artefacts and other physical remains”.***<sup>3</sup>

Based on my field research my reformulation reads as follows:

***“A study of the historic, present and future of mankind based on artefacts, found underground as well as above ground. Artefacts being objects, stories, systems and traces of the development of the city. Archaeology is about preserving, telling and creating narratives. Opening up opportunities to think ahead for the future.”***

<sup>3</sup> Oxford Languages. Archaeology. In Oxford Languages. Consulted 08.05.202.







Sterk, N. & van Ryswyck, L., "To See a World in a Grain of Sand.", ongoing.



Sterk, N. & van Ryswyck, L., "To See a World in a Grain of Sand.", ongoing.



Sterk, N. & van Ryswyck, L., "To See a World in a Grain of Sand.", ongoing.



Sterk, N. & van Ryswyck, L., "To See a World in a Grain of Sand.", filmstill, ongoing.

**The start of surfacing archaeology. “As people learn about their surroundings, they begin to identify more deeply with place.”<sup>4</sup>**

By allowing people their own choice of what they think is of value or having them bring something that they think defines a specific place, one gets access to an accumulation of stories, and different aspects of narratives. This is something personal, because these stories reflect the relationships that people create with particular places. Sometimes sub-consciously but consciously too.

This is also how I encountered the project *GEO DESIGN - To See a World in a Grain of Sand*. A project by *Atelier NL*, where the two designers, *Nadine Sterk and Lonny van Ryswyck*, share with others their affection of traveling and (in this case) sand related to a certain place. *What do they consider to be sand? What kind of story or memory is tied to it?* They asked people all over the world to collect sand in a bottle from places that they have a connection with or just to show where they have been.

With this project, Sterk and van Ryswyck want to encourage others to take a conscious look around and observe what is actually out there.<sup>5</sup> In the *van Abbemuseum* they exhibit the result of the various types of sand that were submitted.

<sup>4</sup> Sterk, N. & van Ryswyck, L., “To See a World in a Grain of Sand.”, ongoing, <https://www.atelienl.com/projects/to-see-a-world-in-a-grain-of-sand> consulted: 08.05.2021.  
<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

The exhibition gives an overview of a collection of different stories that people left behind written on the bottles, to indicate why they took this particular sand. It also literally shows the different properties of each type of sand, such as color, texture and composition.

Normally a project like this is seen as something geological. Nevertheless, that’s not how I approached this project. Instead, I regard this as something that can be seen as an archaeological aspect. Because archaeology is about more than just the materiality below the surface, it is about conducting narratives, visible or invisible. And in this case, the sand, which is a visible layer, is holding narratives. Yet they tell far more than they show. These are what I like to call the hidden narratives.<sup>6</sup> For designers, the challenge here is to tell these hidden stories, using storytelling

<sup>6</sup> Hidden narratives referring in this case to the different qualities of the sand and the memories tied to the place where they took the sand.







*Photo during workshop at Scheveningen, 2021, Own archive.*



*Photo during workshop at Scheveningen, 2021, Own archive.*



Artefacts found on Marine Terrein, 2021, Own archive.



Artefacts found on Marine Terrein by archaeologists, 2021, Own archive.



## Changing perspective.

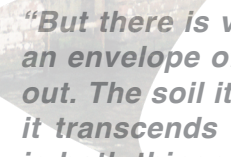
The Marine Terrein consists of many different layers - *soil types, such as sand or clay; animal bones, plants and other organic materials; toxic contaminants from the nautical activities which took place there and a whole collection of disparate objects ranging from plastic water bottles to seventeenth century ceramics.* The different layers of the island's history, have gathered over time, both underground, as well as above the ground. This particular angle grasped my attention. The materiality that resides in the ground, carrying stories of the past, revealing the archaeological value of the Marine Terrein and how these different layers contribute to the identity of this site.

After encountering the terrain a number of times, I couldn't continue to relate to the site as I normally did, through its materiality. During a recent workshop investigating how aspects of value relate to sites, something in my perspective on the Marine Terrein changed. **Where I always used to surmise that objects or materials are the carriers of value, it dawned on me that an object is not always the best way to define value.**

From our research, we know that much has already been found in the soil of the Marine Terrein. The collection of all that was found can be seen in the book "*Stuff.*"<sup>7</sup> which was compiled by *Jerzy Gawronski* and his team. The material remains of human activities that reflect life and dynamism together inform us about the development and spatial history of the city.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Gawronski, J. & Kranendonk, P., "*Spul.*", 2018, Uitgeverij de Harmonie.  
<sup>8</sup>J. Gawronski & P. Kranendonk, "*Below the surface, classificatie en catalogus.*" <https://below-the-surface.amsterdam.nl/pagina/de-op-gravingen-13> consulted: 15.05.2021.

<sup>9</sup>Sekulić, D., Tomić, M., & Sattler, P., "*Digging up the past: soil as archive - Investigative memorialisation.*", 2020; <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/digging-up-the-past-soil-as-archive> consulted: 03.05.2021  
<sup>10</sup>Ronald Klein, interview  
<sup>11</sup>Jerzy Gawronski - interview.



***"But there is value to soil which is much more than just an envelope of the historical artefacts waiting to be dug out. The soil itself is both an ecofact and an artefact and it transcends the divide between nature and culture: it is both things at the same time. It is a past but it is also present."***<sup>9</sup>

The book "*Stuff.*", categorizes the artefacts that have been found on the site in a very methodical manner. It is tied to the past. It feels like the end of an era. *But why should the era end there?* We as designers should look beyond the past and work with the past as inspiration for the present and the future.

However, my position did not only change because of my own experience on the site and the workshop I mentioned earlier, but also because of the experiences and stories of other users of the site. By merging these, a clearer picture emerges of how rich the area actually is and how everyone has their personal interpretation.

For example, it surprised me that the *two archaeologists* working on the site have different perspectives of the Marine Terrein. Admittedly, they did share the same archaeological/historical points of view, but for one of the archaeologists, *Ronald Klein*, it was mainly about the objects and how a story can be reconstructed from these objects.<sup>10</sup>

For the other archaeologist, *Jerzy Gawronski*, it was about the intangible heritage. With this latter perspective we recognized that the Marine Terrein is not very interesting from an archaeologically point of view, at least not the materiality. But here, archaeology is seen as a system. A hidden system that shows the development of the city.<sup>11</sup>





*Analogue Photo on Marine Terrain, 2021, Own archive.*



*Analogue Photo on Marine Terrain, 2021, Own archive.*





Photo of Zeche Zollverein, Essen, 2020, Own archive.

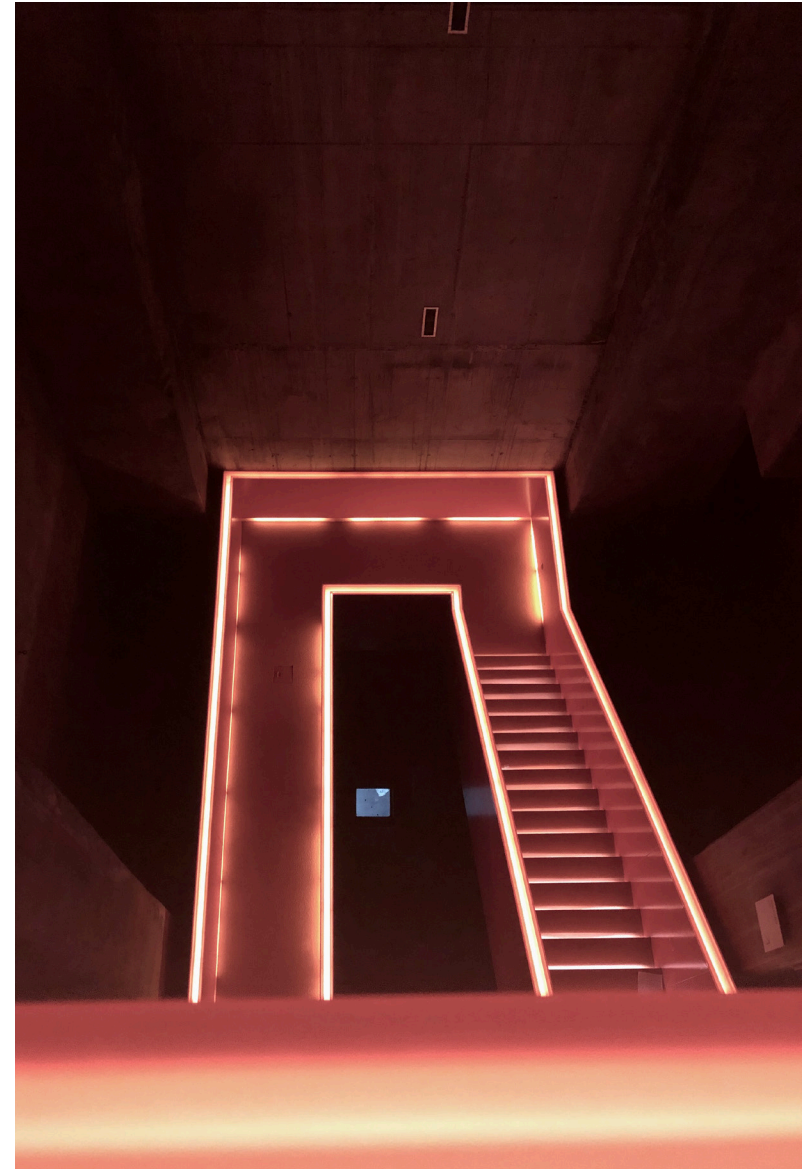


Photo of Zeche Zollverein, Essen, 2020, Own archive.

## Collaboration between the past, present and future.

***“Just like an organism, a territory has its own DNA, a memory in which a mass of identity information, traces, and footprints are encoded. This mass may be left passive, buried under ever-increasing ruins, or it may be activated. [...] Some traces are valued, while others are obscured. The remains, fossils, and relics of the past are sometimes staged, as in a memorial. More often, however, we try to forget them. The earth underground is paradoxically a material and collective unconscious to bury and hide what we would like to ignore.”***<sup>12</sup>

I see a place as an archive of stories or even memories. Stories that contribute to the identity of a site. These hidden stories, as described here, we would prefer to keep buried and build on top of them so we don't have to think about what has passed. *But why should we keep the hidden hidden and not let it come to the surface?* To contribute to the here and now and the future of the site.

*How can I use elements from the past of the Marine Terrein to trace new possibilities (value), without starting with a clean slate and deleting what is already known?*

Asking myself this question, automatically brings me back to the book *Rewriting Architecture*. Which contains a collection of projects that work from the term *Tabula Scripta* which refers to the 'written slate'. *“It<sup>13</sup> investigated ways in which (landscape) architecture and urban design can and should relate to this condition, whereby the existing context is not seen as a limitation, but as an opportunity to make use of and a latent potential for a design.”*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ait-Touati, F., Arènes, A. & Grégoire, A. "Terra Forma, Mapping Ruined Soils.", Published by Stanford university press; <https://feralatlantis.digital.org/index?text=terra-forma-mapping-ruined-soils&type=es-say&cd=true> consulted: 03.05.2021  
<sup>13</sup> "It" refers to The book "Rewriting architecture."  
<sup>14</sup> Alkemade, F. van Iersel, M. Ouburg, J. "Tabula Scripta - re-writing architecture.", 2019, Valiz, INTRODUCTION p.21 - p.32.

<sup>15</sup> Alkemade, F. van Iersel, M. Ouburg, J. "Tabula Scripta - re-writing architecture.", 2019, Valiz, - Umwertung aller werte (the revaluation of all values) - Friedrich Nietzsche." P.190 - p193.  
<sup>16</sup> Alkemade, F. van Iersel, M. Ouburg, J. "Tabula Scripta - re-writing architecture.", 2019, Valiz, - HOW CAN ARCHITECTURE BE REDEFINED BY THE ACT OF GIVING NEW PURPOSE TO EXISTING SPACES?" P.170.

I would like to highlight one of the projects that I find fascinating with the Marine Terrein in mind. A project about the *Zeche Zollverein*, a coal-mine located in Essen, which closed in 1985. This site had architectural allure and a sense of pride. When its demolition was planned, a strong sense of loss was released. This resulted in *OMA* creating a plan that looked at what could be reused from the industrial buildings whereby changing as little as possible, to exude the same pride, identity and continuation of a story.<sup>15</sup>

This approach is more focused on the design intervention we will apply after our Marine Terrein research. A project like *Zeche Zollverein* can appear to be about reuse and change of function. But I prefer to approach it from a "written slate" perspective.

*How did they observe the area and which values did they take into creating future scenarios?*

Assigning value to something is also what occurs in archaeology, where objects are excavated if they are valuable enough and contribute to a piece of the larger narrative.

What I find intriguing about this project when compared to the Marine Terrein, is that *Zeche Zollverein's* use in the past was also different than in the present. The approach to the area, even although its function changed, is that it still continues to carry the story of what it was. One of the most intelligent forms of architecture is to minimize the need for spatial intervention by creatively reinterpreting and reactivating the use value of existing spaces.<sup>16</sup>



## Conclusion.

My research objective was to find value in a place where I did not immediately recognize value. By studying another discipline such as archaeology, during my research, I have discovered new possibilities to explore and define a site. My experiences relating to the materiality on the Marine Terrein led to a new consideration for my position as a designer.

***“Archaeology now, is about physical things you can discover but also things that are not physically in the present but are part of the physical world. Archaeology is multidisciplinary and it is about creating a narrative.”<sup>17</sup>***

I have come to realize that not only does the materiality of a place tell the story, but there are also non-physical hidden stories that contribute to the identity.

All these different events; changes; stories; perspectives and also certainly narratives form a system, a system which is recognized by me as a part of archaeology. As researchers, we now see the archaeological value of the site in its potential as a network system, also because it encompasses many different aspects of an urban environment. This network, although present, is not familiar or visible to its users.

<sup>17</sup> Jerzy  
Gawronski  
- interview.

<sup>18</sup> A study of the historic, present and future of mankind based on artefacts, found underground as well as above ground. Artefacts being objects, stories, systems and traces of the development of the city. Archaeology is about preserving, telling and creating narratives. Opening up opportunities to think ahead for the future.

Regarding the design challenge, our research team would like to work from our reformulation of archaeology<sup>18</sup> and apply it to the Marine Terrein whereby highlighting personal experiences of the terrain's users is essential. We want people to constitute their own value and contribute to the story of the Marine Terrein. The urgency to reveal its chronology, stories and places of the site will be at the heart of our design intervention.

## Sources

- <sup>1</sup> Layers referring to physical, archaeology, geographical layers as well as non tangible layers which could contribute to a narrative.
- <sup>2</sup> Alkemade, F. van Iersel, M. Ouburg, J. "Tabula Scripta - re-writing architecture.", 2019, Valiz, INTRODUCTION p.21 - p.32.
- <sup>3</sup> Oxford Languages
- <sup>4</sup> Sterk, N. & van Ryswyck, L., "To See a World in a Grain of Sand.", ongoing, <https://www.ateliernl.com/projects/to-see-a-world-in-a-grain-of-sand> consulted: 08.05.2021.
- <sup>5</sup> Hidden narratives referring in this case to the different qualities of the sand and the memories tied to the place where people took the sand.
- <sup>6</sup> Gawronski, J. & Kranendonk, P., "Spul.", 2018, Uitgeverij de Harmonie.
- <sup>7</sup> J. Gawronski & P. Kranendonk, "Below the surface, classificatie en catalogus." <https://belowthesurface.amsterdam/nl/pagina/de-opgravingen-13> consulted: 15.05.2021.
- <sup>8</sup> Sekulić, D., Tomić, M., & Sattler, P., "Digging up the past: soil as archive - Investigative memorialisation.", 2020; <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/digging-up-the-past-soil-as-archive> consulted: 03.05.2021
- <sup>9</sup> Ronald Klein, interview
- <sup>10</sup> Jerzy Gawronski - interview.
- <sup>11</sup> Aït-Touati, F., Arènes, A. & Grégoire, A. "Terra Forma, Mapping Ruined Soils.", Published by Stanford university press; <https://feralatlansupdigital.org/index?text=terra-forma-mapping-ruined-soils&type=essay&cd=true> consulted: 03.05.2021
- <sup>12</sup> "It" refers to The book "Rewriting architecture."
- <sup>13</sup> Alkemade, F. van Iersel, M. Ouburg, J. "Tabula Scripta - re-writing architecture.", 2019, Valiz, INTRODUCTION p.21 - p.32.
- <sup>14</sup> Alkemade, F. van Iersel, M. Ouburg, J. "Tabula Scripta - re-writing architecture.", 2019, Valiz, - Umwertung aller werte (the revaluation of all values) - Friedrich Nietzsche." P.190 - p.193.
- <sup>15</sup> Alkemade, F. van Iersel, M. Ouburg, J. "Tabula Scripta - re-writing architecture.", 2019, Valiz, - HOW CAN ARCHITECTURE BE REDEFINED BY THE ACT OF GIVING NEW PURPOSE TO EXISTING SPACES?" P.170.
- <sup>16</sup> Jerzy Gawronski - interview.
- <sup>17</sup> "A study of the historic, present and future of mankind based on artefacts, found underground as well as above ground. Artefacts being objects, stories, systems and traces of the development of the city. Archaeology is about preserving, telling and creating narratives. Opening up opportunities to think ahead for the future."

