

Rhine River Rehearsal



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practice for cultural transformation

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Rhine River Rehearsal

Reimagining a river in five acts

Katía Truijen, Mark Minkjan, Michiel van Iersel, Radna Rumping and René Boer
(Loom – practice for cultural transformation)

May, 2025

Introduction

On a warm summer day in September 2024, five people plop down in the grass next to a ruin of a factory where bricks were once manufactured under great heat. From different locations in The Netherlands—Amsterdam, Alphen aan den Rijn, Rotterdam—the five individuals embarked on a journey along and across the Rhine. They gather on the grass of the Ooijpolder to collectively make a start with their journey. This start is fuelled by imagination, memory and some questions: where do land and water come together for you? Can you share a recent memory, an image of this? With their eyes closed, in a circle, backs lying down in the grass, various voices and stories mingle: about a dewdrop on the balcony, about a leakage in a kitchen, swimming as a child in the Mediterranean... Now they are on the move, following a fluid itinerary that allows them to float freely, across deep time and present day borders, defying the river as a line in the landscape.

Rhine River Rehearsal is an artistic research journey undertaken by Loom – practice for cultural transformation. During the past year its five members have been engaging with the Rhine river as a complex and ever-changing environment that is both affected by and contributing to a rapidly changing climate.

With increasing floods and periods of severe drought due to the escalating climate emergency, people living along the Rhine, and its numerous tributaries, will need to reposition themselves in relation to the river and its delta. The deeply rooted narrative of water management and control in The Netherlands—which continues to be exported to many other parts of the world—will likely not prepare us for the extreme circumstances we will encounter in the coming years and decades.

How to live with an abundance, or lack, of water? How can we rehearse different attitudes towards this natural phenomenon that affects everyone and everything living near and inside of it? Could we move away, embrace, or find other modes of living with(in) the river delta—beyond the river as a controlled, linear and man-made, colonial construct? Beyond an abstract space between two lines on a map that needs to be contained?

Loom is interested in the notion of wetness, as described by landscape architects Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha, who question the man-made division between water and land in their many projects and writings. They pose the question of how we can live in a world of ubiquitous wetness, where water is everywhere?

Between 1 and 5 September 2024, members of Loom made a journey and followed and deviated from the Rhine river, questioned its geography, bringing together different perspectives to approach the Rhine river, from The Ubiquitous River (Michiel), the Unruly River (René) and the Resounding River (Katía), to the Regenerative River (Mark) and the Embodied River (Radna).



In this cahier, we bring together five essays that explore each of these perspectives, followed by two short reflections by landscape architect Dirk Sijmons and artist Zahra Malkani.

The Rhine River Rehearsal is a rehearsal on different levels. We call the project itself a rehearsal, because we feel the need to collectively and actively develop, test, and share different approaches to living with, and alongside water. It is also an attempt to find a different vocabulary, as we all look for alternative notions, images and forms that can help us to describe or sense the climate crisis we find ourselves in. What if we introduce such concepts as ‘queering’ (see ‘the Unruly River’, p. 19) or ‘embodied research’ (see ‘The Embodied River’, p. 39) when considering a river? What if we would apply the simple idea that a brick is a river without water, to the construction industry (see ‘The Regenerative River, p. 31)? What if we come to realise that current forms of human habitation are incompatible with the changing weather conditions (see ‘The Ubiquitous River’, p. 11) or that when we listen to a river we can hear across time and space through forms of sonic time travelling (see ‘The Resounding River’, p. 25)?

For us as a collective practice, the project is also a rehearsal in researching and learning together. Each of the five of us brings a different position and approach to the river delta, while we find a common ground in how we can understand and question the river as a linear construct, and how we can overcome the binaries between land and water, wet and dry, nature and culture, while asking in which ways the river itself carries and claims agency.

While we have been deliberately traveling and researching the Rhine river delta, as a territory we are all familiar with, the Rhine also serves as a placeholder or test case for other, related topics and territories, as the urgencies we identify and questions we raise also apply to other domains and geographies.

Our work coalesced in a collective offering on 5 March 2025 at the Goethe-Institut Amsterdam, where we invited people to join us for a rehearsal of the project itself. Presenting and performing a selection of artefacts, documents, texts and sounds, and mixing scripted and structured elements with improvised moments, the rehearsal was structured in five acts, and served as a first try-out to reflect on our journey and as a collective moment to reimagine the river together. Some first reflections—by Dirk Sijmons and Zahra Malkani—are included in this publication (see p. 45-49).

This cahier is an attempt to bring together a selection of moments, people, thoughts, doubts and questions for further research. In a sense it mimics the Rhine river basin as a confluence of different streams, sediments and (hi)stories. Acknowledging the numerous academic and artistic research projects that have explored the Rhine in the past, we hope this cahier contributes to the ongoing conversation about the past, present and future of this river with a freshly filled reservoir of ideas, insights, imaginaries and concrete actions that bring us closer to this fluid phenomenon and let us think and act more in tune with, and not against it. Please follow us on our journey into wetness.

Itinerary

From Amsterdam, Alphen aan den Rijn and Rotterdam—all part of the Rhine river delta—we traveled to the Ooijpolder area near Nijmegen and the former brickworks Kleverbergh.

We then traveled further along the Meuse river, where we found the Belfeld gravel pit, after noticing a scar in the landscape on Google maps. Here we met Joep, who had been working at the gravel quarry for 35 years, and we discovered that the Meuse and Rhine once flowed together in the same river bed.

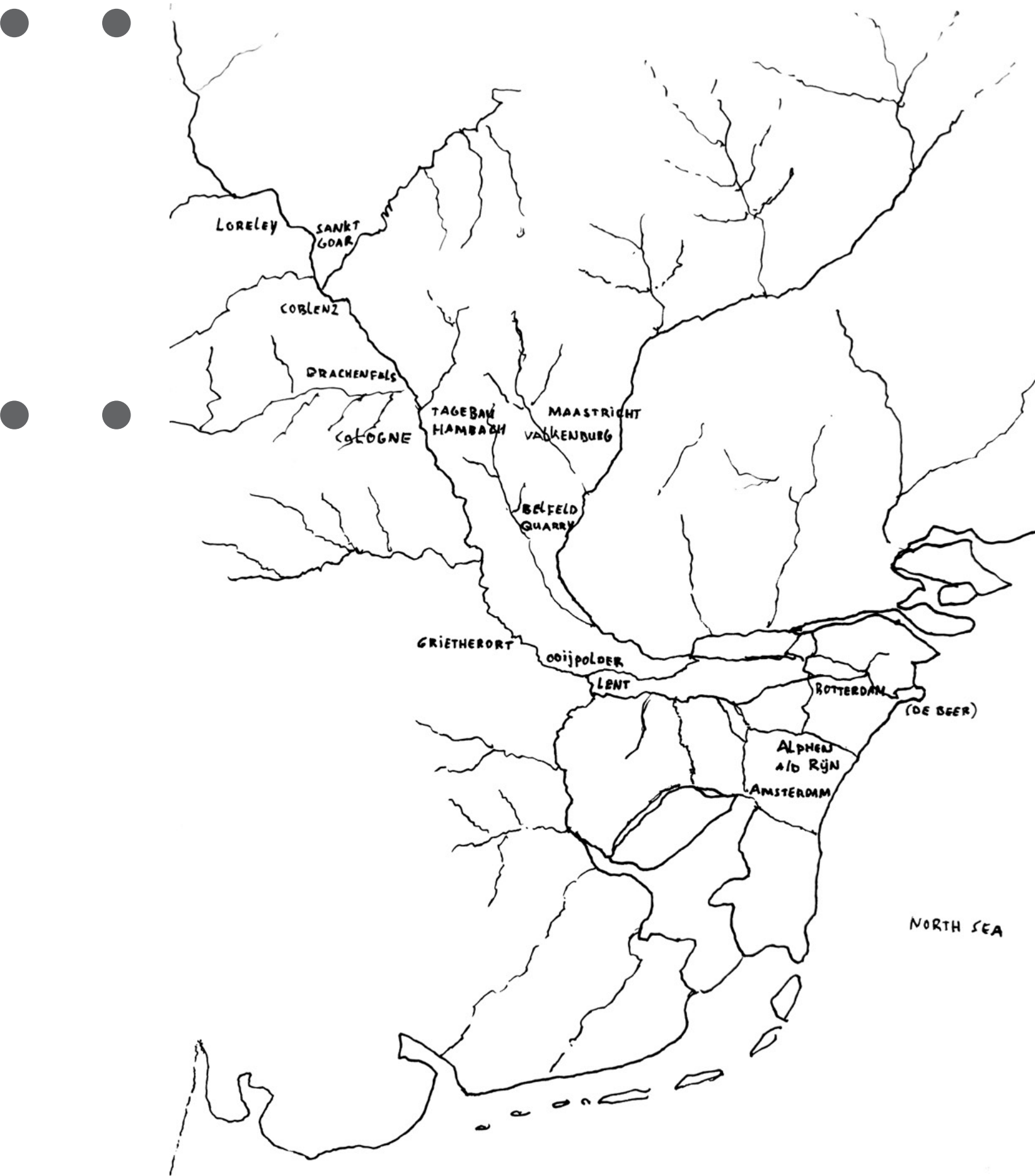
We stopped at the recently flooded city of Valkenburg, where things seemed to have returned to normal, as if nothing had happened, and where we made a sound walk in silence.

We traveled to deserted Mannheim, a former mining village, close to the large Hambach Tagebau open-cast brown coal mine, which will likely become a future Rhine basin and inland lake, despite resistance from surrounding communities.

We followed the river to the Rheinromantik of Schloss Drachenfels and de Loreley area, where we discussed the gendered landscape and different ways in which rivers are straightened.

Travelling back along the river, we explored Grietherort, an island that is flooded each year during the winter because of cutting off the old Rhine river, and where only a few houses on terps remain above water level. Here we stayed at Campingplatz Grietherort, where we were welcomed by Judith, Valentijn and their children.

Before, during and after the trip we went on different ‘wetness walks’ near the Hambach Tagebau mine, around Grietherort, around Noordereiland in Rotterdam and across the historic inner city of Amsterdam, and its surrounding landscapes, to the sea. During these walks we experienced the different degrees and forms of wetness and how water shapes the environment.



Drawing: Sketch of Rhine River delta between the Loreley in Germany and the North Sea. North is at the bottom and South on top. Drawing by Michiel van Iersel, 2024



Transcript of a conversation with
Joep Pijnenburg, supervisor
Belfeld Quarry (selection)

[while walking towards the sorting machines]

—The stones here, they go through a sieve machine, and then they are washed or refined. We pull the sand and gravel apart. Then we make sand with size 0.1, 0.2 and 0.4. And then we have 3 types of gravel left. The 4-8, the 8-16 and the 16-32.

Here you can see that there is Maas in between. It is not only Rhine, this deposit. Because this is lydite, and that is actually a Maas deposit.

—And what is a Rhine deposit?

—Quartz. Agate. But you also have lydite here, and Maas pebbles.

—Do you also find fossils here?

—You can sit here for 35 years and not know anything, but if you are interested in something... In ten years, together with Leiden University, we have found more than 30,000 molars of mammals, such as a molar of a macaque, a tapir, a forest elephant, and five species of mole.

—And also marine animals?

—Yes, molars of fish species...

Image: Guided around the Belfeld quarry
by Joep Pijnenburg. Photo by Loom, 2024



The Ubiquitous River

Michiel van Iersel

A CONFLUENCE OF STORIES

At heart, I am a swimmer. Like most kids in The Netherlands, I had to learn to swim when I was still quite young. During my childhood, I spent most of our family vacations in the south of France snorkeling. Days would pass uneventfully, while I was submerged in the wondrous underwater world of the Riviéra. Oftentimes, I would try to hold my breath as long as possible while I was skirting swiftly round rock formations, chasing octopuses and small fishes. Testing the limits of my own physical strength and endurance, I would exhaust all but the last tiny bit of oxygen in my body before making my way back to the surface. Gasping for air, I would use the upward thrust—exerted by the density and salinity of the warm Mediterranean water on my submerged body—to propel myself back into the water without spending even a second in the sunlight. Defying the gravitational pull of the earth, I would glide smoothly through this submarine world, being both elevated above and connected to everything it contains, from the fish and plants to the microorganisms and water molecules. Each time, again and again, I felt totally safe.

At the age of eight, I joined the local swimming team. The following decade I would dedicate almost all my spare time to swimming. It turned out I had a talent for it. A few years later, I transferred to the country’s top club in Amsterdam. We trained each morning and afternoon. Every weekend there would be a competition. On average, during each training session, we would cover four to five kilometers swimming laps. Although I never made it to the Olympics or other major international tournaments, it is fair to say that swimming shaped my sense of self.

During these years, I was living with my parents in a town called Alphen aan den Rijn. The name refers to its location along the Oude Rijn (“Old Rhine”), a branch of the Rhine delta in the Dutch provinces of Utrecht and South Holland, starting west of Utrecht, at Harmelen, and emptying via a mechanical pumping station into the North Sea at Katwijk. In ancient times, it was the lower part of the main Rhine River, which forked at the Betuwe into a northern branch, the Rhine, and a southern branch, the Waal. The (Old) Rhine then was much wider than it is now, and tidal. Around 40 AD, the river formed part of the northern border of the Roman Empire. The Romans built a military fort there, as part of a range of strategically situated encampments, to protect and guard the river, as the frontier of the Roman Empire and main transport route of goods and troops. The settlement was named Albaniana (“by the white waters”) and was constructed using water-resistant wood. The original population lived South-west of the fort, on higher grounds. Later, in medieval times, the Old Rhine silted up and the Lek River became the main outlet for the Rhine. In the following centuries the river stayed important to drain the nearby polders, for the clay industry, and as a vital trade route.

Today, the Old Rhine still slices the town in half: the Hoge Zijde (upper side) and Lage Zijde (lower side). However, this ancient water stream appears more like an artificially constructed channel than a naturally flowing river. Despite the explicit attribution in the town's name, the river plays no significant role in the lives of its inhabitants. With both banks of the river straightened, walled and almost fully built up, it remains largely hidden from view and inaccessible. Unlike many other rivers, there are no spots where you can go skinny-dipping, let alone swim to the other side. The only real moment of interaction is when you are crossing, or having to wait in front of one of the bridges spanning the Old Rhine.



The author swimming with his brother in the Mediterranean Sea, c.1986

CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENTS

Standing on the Hoge Zijde, near my parent's home, at the start of the Rhine River Rehearsal trip, I realised that I had never touched the Rhine. While spending most of my childhood immersed in many different bodies of water, the Rhine remains a mystery. In many ways, this separation, or even alienation, is symptomatic of the ways in which many Dutch people have dealt with the plain fact that they live in a river delta. With a growing population, and an increasing pressure on the limited land, rivers have become a nuisance that must be tamed, curtailed and obscured. Increasingly, they serve as a drainage system to rid the land of an abundance of water. Only in recent years have we come to realize that the instrumentalization of water has been taken too far. After barely staving off massive floods in the mid-1990's the government made a U-turn in its understanding and handling of the risk of living in a country formed by rivers.

In the years after another near-disaster in 1995, the Ruimte voor de rivier ('Room for the River') programme was initiated and slowly implemented by the national government to give back more space to the rivers in order to reduce the risk of flooding¹. The main goal of the programme was to manage higher water levels in rivers by lowering the levels of flood plains, creating water buffers, relocating levees, increasing the depth of side channels, and the construction of flood bypasses. But by giving rivers more room, the space separating them from our daily lives also increased. In spite of more experimental developments, most notably in Lent where the river

1 For a complete account of the programme, see Room for the river. Safe and attractive landscapes by Dirk Sijmons, Yttje Feddes, Eric Luiten, Fred Feddes and Marc Nolden (blauwdruk publishers, 2017)



2 Read, for example, Design in the Terrain of Water (Applied Research & Design, 2014) or The Invention of Rivers (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018)

has been redirected and an inhabited island is created at the junction of the Waal River and a new bypass, in most cases the programme resulted primarily in ever higher and stronger dikes. Newly created flood zones allow the rivers to temporarily overflow. More densely populated areas however, remain protected from the risk of flooding. Driving on top of one of these reinforced dikes along one of the main rivers, you see the new neighbourhoods deep down below in the polders that are slowly sinking due to the subsiding soil.



Sedimentary layering in a sand and clay succession at the Belfeld quarry. Photo by Loom, 2025.

In the long run however, rivers cannot be contained by lines on a map, by levees in the landscape and a false sense of safety. Instead of giving them more room, and separating ourselves from them, we have to find ways to co-exist with the restless water. The Netherlands, or the piece of the Earth's surface that currently carries this name, has always been a wet and fluid space, continuously shape-shifting over the ages, epochs, eras and eons. When visiting the Belfeld quarry near the city of Venlo during our Rhine River Rehearsal trip, we learned that millions of years ago the Rhine and Meuse rivers both flowed together in this place. Locally sourced minerals from both rivers are testament to this historic confluence. Visiting the same site in the Cretaceous period, about 70 million years ago, you would have been knee-deep in water. A shallow, subtropical Cretaceous sea covered the whole of south Limburg. It teemed with flora and fauna such as sea grasses, corals, fish, sharks, and mosasaurs. The skeletons of these animals formed a thick layer of limestone over millions of years. Even longer ago, hundreds of million years before the present day, vast swaths of swamps covered the area, which eventually became the coal beds that fuelled industrialisation, the Modern era, and ultimately sparked today's climate crisis.

RETHINKING RIVERS

My hometown of Alphen is not simply located along a controlled remnant of the Rhine River, but exists within and evolves alongside a part of the world that is confronted with—what landscape architects Dilip da Cunha and Anuradha Mathur call—a state of ubiquitous wetness². As they remind, rivers are man-made colonial constructs. Only when cartographers started mapping them, did they



Standing on the banks of the Old Rhine in Alphen aan den Rijn at the start of the Rhine River Rehearsal trip. Photo by Loom, 2024



Detail of Harold Fisk's Meander Maps of the Mississippi River (1944) showing the shape-shifting nature of rivers



Dark clouds gathering above Amsterdam (Source: ANP)



Flood waters rush through the centre of Valkenburg aan de Geul in 2022 (Source: Sem Van Der Wal/AFP)



Grietherort during high water (Source: Rheinische Post)

3 Ionita, M., Nagavciuc, V., and Guan, B.: Rivers in the sky, flooding on the ground: the role of atmospheric rivers in inland flooding in central Europe, Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci., 24, 2020

become a line in the landscape—and in our collective consciousness—that separates the water from dry land. This colonial concept has had far-reaching real-life implications. Flowing water started to be channelled, damned, extracted and, slowly, polluted. But time and time again, the water has shown us that it cannot be controlled. It is everywhere. Rivers do not sit neatly in between two river banks. All the drizzle, rain, snow, ice pellets, and hail filling the 185 260 km² drainage area of the Rhine River basin in the form of flowing surface water is, unless it evaporates or sinks into the soil, funneled through the Dutch delta before reaching the North Sea. There, the relatively warm currents cause the water to evaporate and create atmospheric rivers, narrow corridors of concentrated moisture in the atmosphere. Recent research has shown that these atmospheric rivers are producing extreme flooding and heavy rainfall events in the lower part of the Rhine catchment area³. According to these researchers precipitation anomalies associated with climate change, specifically heavy rain, will only increase in its intensity and frequency. While we try to tame the Rhine River that snakes through our countries and cities, another, atmospheric river is filling our skies with long, meandering plumes of water vapor looming over the soaked polders and saturated dikes down below.

Increasingly, local communities are caught off guard by the abrupt and violent disturbances of the terrestrial water cycle. In July 2021, several European countries and cities were affected by severe floods. Some were catastrophic, causing deaths and widespread damage. Some of the affected regions may not have seen rainfall of this magnitude in the last 1,000 years. Certain already wet regions in the west of Germany and east of Belgium experienced rainfall in 24 hours equaling the average rainfall during an entire month in the same period.

DESIGNING FOR A FLOOD

After experiencing an unusually heavy rainfall that deposited 146 mm of rain across the Geul catchment area, the city of Valkenburg aan de Geul in the south of The Netherlands, which is named after the Geul River which flows through the town centre, was unprepared for the sudden flash flood that caused several hundreds of millions of Euros in damages and left many citizens traumatized. While visiting Valkenburg during the Rhine River Rehearsal trip we were struck by the almost eerie silence and tidiness in a town that was almost swallowed by its namesake. Affected shops, hotels and homes have been renovated and appear new. Since the day on which an avalanche of water crushed down its streets, the city has invested in an overflow area and advanced Flood Early Warning System. But will it be enough when an even bigger atmospheric river falls from the skies?

Dilip da Cunha, the landscape architect, once asked me and my fellow students: “How can we inhabit a hurricane? And how can we live with the fact that all disasters are human-made? Rivers are not bothered by floods. We are.” “So,” he continued, “how can we design for a flood, not for a dry state?”. Ever since first hearing them, these questions have kept circling in my head. And they eventually came to haunt me during a small holiday drama.

INHABITING A RIVER

Last year we spent our summer vacation on the Danish coast in North Zealand, in an attempt to escape the exceptional heat that makes large parts of Europe unbearable during this season. Our small cottage bordered on a narrow beach. Looking from our garden I was surprised to see no noteworthy dunes along the shore of the nearby sea, which is called Kattegat. Next to our house there was a small stream which flowed straight into the sea. As soon as we stepped onto the sand, my three year old son started running towards the mouth of the stream, where the cold fresh water from the hinterland clashed with the waves of salt water with white crests. I ran after him and after reaching the confluence I quickly had to make up my mind: should I prevent him from entering the water, and risk an outburst of anger and revolt, or should I help him cross the water safely? Since it was the start of our vacation I tried to avoid a conflict and took my toddler by the hand. He took that as a sign and pulled me into the stream. The water turned out to be much colder, the current much stronger, and the rocks much more slippery than I had anticipated. I immediately lost my balance, my legs sliding sideways while I stretched my arms to hold my son. The water showed no patience and pushed us downstream. It took only a few seconds before regaining my grip, but it seemed an eternity. My son cried frantically. He was ok, just shocked by the suddenness of our little accident. I looked at his soaking wet face and had an epiphany. If the current had been even stronger, there would have been nothing I could have done for him. It was the first time in my life that I felt frightened by the very same phenomenon that had shaped my sense of self.

Swimming will not save us when the water—when the flash flood—comes. Largely invisible and elusive, water is much stronger and smarter than us. Instead of resisting, or attempting to control it, we should find ways to live with it and move with its frenetic energy. We would do well to learn from some of the communities we visited during our Rhine River Rehearsal trip. For example, from the people in such seemingly insignificant places as Ooij, near the city of Nijmegen. This town developed in the early Middle Ages on higher grounds and artificial mounds near the Waal River has managed to survive a millennium of floods. Or the island of Grietherort, across the border in nearby Germany, which sits in the middle of a palimpsest of meanders—past, present and future—of the Rhine River. Here, people had to learn to navigate the Rhine’s many fluctuations through both space and time. During the annual flooding season, the island shrinks in size and becomes disconnected from its surroundings over land. Residents are ferried across the river resembling a sea of water by small boats that are operated by the fire brigade. Nobody panics. Life continues, just like it always has. It is in these, and other waterborne places and communities—or, to borrow from landscape architect Frédéric Rossano: “flood-scapes”⁴—where we can learn to live in a world of ubiquitous wetness. And where we can rehearse for the near future in which we all will be forced to inhabit, instead of distancing ourselves from, the river.

4 Floodscapes – Contemporary Landscape Strategies in Times of Climate Change, Frédéric Rossano, Nai010 Publishers, 2021



HOW TO LIVE IN A WORLD OF UBIQUITOUS WETNESS?

Drawing by Michiel van Iersel



5 The full text in German as well as English translation can be easily found online by simply searching for “the loreley heinrich heine”.

The Unruly River

René Boer

(..)

Die Luft ist kühl und es dunkelt,
Und ruhig fließt der Rhein;
Der Gipfel des Berges funkelt
Im Abendsonnenschein.

Die schönste Jungfrau sitzet
Dort oben wunderbar,
Ihr goldnes Geschmeide blitzet,
Sie kämmt ihr goldenes Haar.

(..)

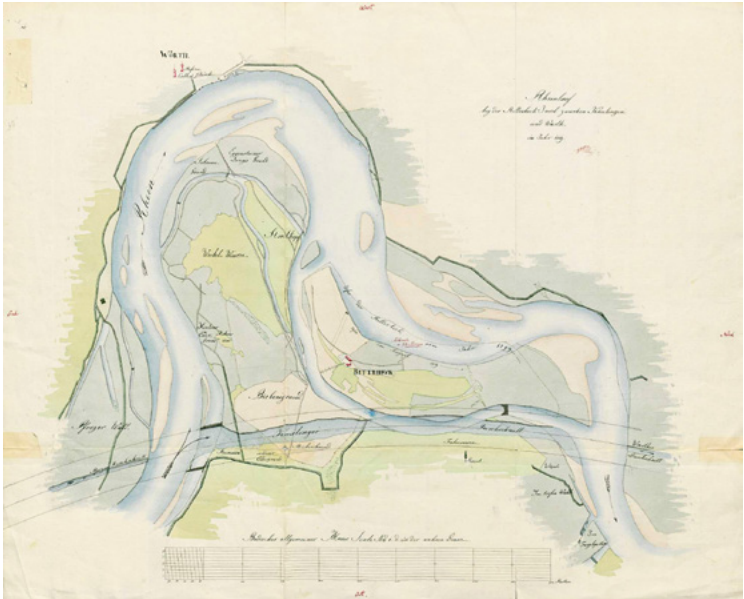
QUEERING DIE LORELEY

These are two of the six verses of Heinrich Heine’s poem Die Loreley⁵ from 1824, which I had to learn by heart in German class in second grade. It’s about a ‘gorgeous maid’ with ‘golden hair’ sitting on a mountain top overlooking the Rhine, seducing boatmen with her ‘wondrous melodies’, distracting them from their navigational duties and leading them to an untimely death. For our German teacher it was probably quite an innocent attempt to share some classic German poetry with his pupils, while for us it was mostly a struggle to get all the umlauts right more than anything else. In hindsight however, and perhaps despite the silliness of the story it may not be so innocent at all. Looking back, for me this particular poem represents a small and simple yet very explicit example of the ‘background’ of toxic heteronormativity (and sexism), which was inescapable growing up as queer boy in Amsterdam in the early 2000s.

When the shared interest of the Loom team in notions such as ‘wetness’ and transforming landscapes brought us to the Rhine as the structuring element of a collective research project it was this poem (and the ability to still recite it almost in full) which came to mind, and which became the starting point of developing my lens of looking at the Rhine river. Reading about the context in which Heine wrote his poem I learned about the Rheinromantik, a specific way of looking at the Rhine river landscape during the Romantic period from the late 18th to the early 19th century. At the time, many artists developed an interest in the ‘wild’ and ‘untouched’ landscapes of especially the Oberes Mittelrheintal (Upper Rhine Valley). This part of the Rhine, roughly between Mainz and Bonn, is particularly scenic as the river flows through a gorge with high cliffs and dotted with medieval ruins. These landscapes soon became a major source of inspiration for a new genre of literature and art.

Along with the artists, the German elite also developed an obsession for this geographical setting, which led them to order the construction of a wide variety of castles, palaces and religious edifices in prominent locations along the Rhine, often emulating a wide range of eclectic, medieval building styles. Always looking to

copy the behaviour of the elite, the growing middle classes were not able to settle themselves permanently along the Rhine nor could they afford the by then well established tradition of the 'Grand Tour'⁶, the traditional trip to Italian landscapes and ruins made by upper class youngsters. Decreasing travel costs, however, allowed the middle classes to visit the Rhine Valley in large numbers instead. A nascent tourist industry jumped on this trend and started to promote the area, using new printing techniques, with reproductions of the texts and art works romanticising the Rhine Valley in superlatives.



The meandering Rhine river in 1799 (top) versus the straightened waterway in 1819 (bottom part) between Knielingen und Woerth, near the German city of Karlsruhe [Source: Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe]

Around the same time period in which the Rheinromantik emerged and the touristic exploitation of the Rhine river basin started, ambitious plans were being made for the so-called Rheinbegradigung, or 'straightening' of the Rhine. Historically, the river used to frequently change course and meander wildly through a broad floodplain with many small islands, but engineers like Johann Tula and later Max Honsell proposed to constrain the floodplain, control the course of the river and in particular reduce its length by cutting off the larger loops. The main aim of the straightening of the Rhine, also sometimes referred to with the telling terms Rheinregulierung, Rheinkorrektur or Rheinrektifikation, was to optimize the river for commercial shipping at the dawn of the industrial revolution. Between 1817 and 1876, the Rhine river was changed almost beyond recognition, with considerable social and ecological consequences.

While at first sight the romanticisation of a river on the one hand and its industrial optimisation on the other might seem like two incompatible approaches, Rheinromantik and Rheinbegradigung can be seen as two sides of the same coin. In fact, it is strongly reminiscent of Orientalism⁷, which emerged in the same historical period and is also characterized by the simultaneous deployment of two seemingly disparate approaches towards a certain geography. Orientalism refers to the entire framework used by the 'West' to

6 The Grand Tour was the 17th- to early 19th-century custom of a traditional trip through Europe, with Italy as a key destination, undertaken by upper-class young European men of sufficient means and rank.

7 For a solid introduction on this phenomenon, read Edward Said's book Orientalism from 1978

impose itself on what they perceive as the 'Orient', generally North-Africa and the whole of Asia. Similar to Rheinromantik and Rheinbegradigung, it combines the excessive romanticisation and exoticisation by Western artists, scholars and travellers of everything related to the 'Orient' with the perceived right to study, control, intervene and exploit it at the same time.

Orientalist representations in art and literature often had a heavily gendered component. Depictions of landscapes portrayed 'exotic' but 'submissive' women in 'wild' and 'empty' natural environments, suggesting both the women and the landscapes were 'untouched', 'out of control', 'in need of civilisation' and 'available' for 'Western' men. As the renowned literary critic Edward Said and many other scholars have demonstrated, such Orientalist representations have historically played a key role in paving the way for colonial expansion (and are still used to justify Western military intervention today). Interestingly, the poem of Die Loreley functions in a similar way, as it merges the landscape with a female character who is seductive and destructive at the same time. For brave, straight, male readers of the poem the cue is clearly to stay in control while engaging with the seductions of this single, 'available' woman, and are ultimately encouraged to impose order along this 'chaotic' river landscape.



A terrace on the banks of the Nile, 1878. Pierre François Eugène Giraud

As a result not only the engineered optimisation of the Rhine river landscape can be regarded as a form of 'straightening', but the Rheinromantik and the gendered order it proposes as well. Today, both forms of straightening are still highly visible along the Rhine river, with an entire section layered with sexist references to Die Loreley and long stretches with hard and unwelcoming river banks resulting from the Rheinbegradigung. In these straight parts riverine life incompatible with commercial objectives, such as non-human ecologies or just simple leisure swimming, have long disappeared. During the research trip made by Loom in late summer 2024 the notion of straightening, and its specific forms such as delineating and categorising as well as its negation through 'queering', became one of the lenses to look at and understand the river landscape in its widest sense, and the starting point of many conversations.

It was in particular the notion of queering which sparked new

discussions of transcending dominant narratives and representations with regard to the Rhine, and to other rivers and bodies of water in general. If such a normative representation of the Rhine in its most essential form is the traditional, blue thin line on the map, what would a queer representation look like? Would such a representation align with the ideas of the aforementioned landscape architects Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha allude to with regard to ‘ubiquitous wetness’ and their understanding of water being omnipresent instead of being confined to a delineated entity such as a river? In any case understanding the Rhine in such a way would already be closer to the historical appearance of the Rhine wetlands, or to the floodings of future summers to come. At the same time it has often been argued that the transgressive, expansive character of queering and its impulse to do away with strict demarcations doesn’t mean queering means abolishing difference: we’re not all queer, and not everything is water. Can a queer engagement with the Rhine, or water in general, rather than a generalisation become a specific articulation, or otherwise an act of negation, refusal or disruption?

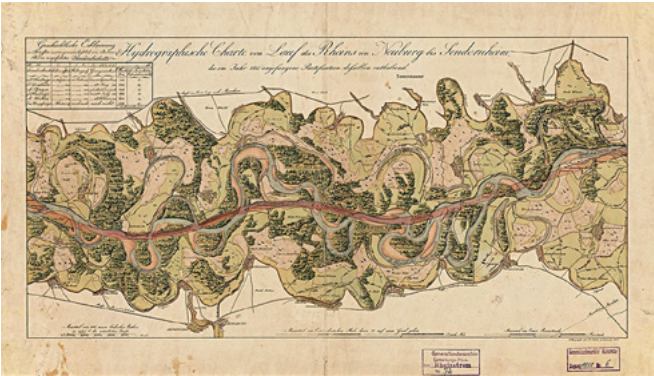
Many present-day transformations of the Rhine are exceptional, but hardly non-normative. The filling of the massive brown coal open pit mine of Hambach Tagebau with Rhine water is more aligned with the historic hubris of Rheinbegradigung than anything else. Even the more progressive ‘Room for the River’ approach⁸, tested among others in Nijmegen near the German border, is ultimately a highly engineered and controlled intervention on the river landscape. So what are the queer left-overs of the straightening of the Rhine, or the queer take-overs through its inversions, provocations or under-commons? Will it ever be possible to undo the harsh, lifeless and industrial separation of water and land as a result of the Rheinbegradigung or dismantle the touristic river landscapes saturated with overconsumption and sexist symbolism resulting from the Rheinromantik? Is it even possible to queer the Rhine?

Probably it’s in the nature of queering to evade such broad and overarching questions, and the answer can (perhaps) only be found in making the effort to recognise the first instances of existing queerness, small and large, which are often hidden in plain sight. The queer friction is probably in the sediment that due to the lower water levels in summer and higher water speeds in winter is rapidly but invisibly changing the Rhine’s river bed, and maybe its future course. The queer brilliance is in the rhinestones, or rock crystals found in the Rhine since the late 18th century, which have made so many dresses, tiaras and other drag outfits so extravagant ever since. The queer abundance is in the cut-off river loops near Grietherort where rich ecologies of greenery, fish and birds continue to thrive outside the streamlined water artery nearby. Or the queer beauty is in the story of a boy, hacking the system of Rhine barges to travel upstream in summer, for free, against the river’s current.

8 See the previous chapter for a more elaborate description



View from the Isteiner Klotz, c. 1800, Peter Birmann



Rheinbegradigung (Rhine correction) between Neuburg and Sondernheim, 1825. Source: Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg (detail)



A bulk carrier barge passes the BASF SE chemical plant on the banks of the River Rhine in Ludwigshafen in Germany in 2023. Photographer: Ben Kilb/Bloomberg



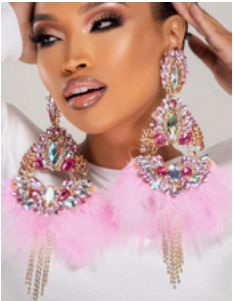
Post cards depicting the Loreley, 1899



Present day post cards depicting the Loreley. Photo by Loom, 2024



Loreley Figure in the Rhine Valley, Germany. Photo: Diadis/Shutterstock



Extra Large Drag Queen Earrings Costume Jewelry Rhinestone Feather Statement Earrings for Women Prom (Source: XSBODY Store)



9 www.topotijdreis.nl

10 Find more info about De Beer on www.natuurmonumentdebeer.nl and Ed Buijsman, Een eersteklas landschap. De teloorgang van natuurmonument De Beer, Uitgeverij Matrijs Utrecht, 2007.

11 Polygoon Hollands Nieuws. 1950. Bird breeding area at De Beer. Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, Hilversum.



Scan the QR code to hear:
De Beer polygoon

12 <https://www.bouwmachines-vantoen-archief.nl/bedrijvenpagina/troost/troost.sjabloon.htm>

13 Tina M. Campt, Listening to Images, Duke University Press, 2017.

The Resounding River

Katía Truijen

I.
From where I live in Rotterdam, it's exactly one hour by bike to reach the ‘mouth’ of the river Rhine (in anthropomorphic terms) at the shore of the coastal village Hoek van Holland, and to enter the seawater with your feet. Back at home, I scroll through old maps of this area on a website that allows for topographic time travelling⁹. My eyes are drawn to a peninsula that used to be located here, under the curious name ‘De Beer’ (The Bear). The area used to be a large nature reserve and bird breeding island, where rare species such as little terns, sandwich terns, avocets, Kentish plovers and ringed plovers found a welcoming habitat¹⁰. A TV-news item from 1950 captured the sound of the terns and seagulls during the breeding season, mixed with dramatic music and the voice of the newscaster discussing the peaceful area¹¹.



Photo of De Beer by F.P.J. Kooijmans, around 1930 (Left) and Expansion of the Europoort harbor. Source: Bouwmachines van toen Archief (Right)

While Rotterdam today seems to be expanding mostly vertically, with not-very-affordable residential towers, the harbor of the city has been expanding for centuries, which has led to the strictly demarcating of the Meuse River (part of the Rhine River delta) and its surrounding land. Between 1958 and 1964, the Europoort harbor expanded considerably, resulting in what perhaps became the most severe 20th century environmental catastrophe or ecocide in The Netherlands. While ‘time traveling’ chronologically through the maps, one sees De Beer being erased and reshaped into a productive, demarcated and controlled landscape.

While biologist and writer Jac. P. Thijsse predicted loud forms of resistance, the only noise would come from the machines and devices, drowning out the sounds of De Beer’s original residents and destroying their habitats forever. I look for clues to what the noise must have sounded like, and find an online archive of the machinery of the old construction company Troost (a Dutch family name which means ‘consolation’), with photos of the expansion of the Europoort harbor¹². I’m trying to imagine the noisy landscape. Sounds of birds as they are chased away. Vessels on the water. Trucks and excavators moving piles of sand. The construction of dams, the paving of roads. The low hum of engines. The high-pitched clatter of steel on steel. The difficult to hear voices of construction workers. It reminds me of feminist theorist Tina M. Campt’s publication *Listening to Images*, and her invitation to listen for ‘low frequencies’ in archives¹³.

“If the city of Rotterdam ever wanted to build at The Beer at Hoek van Holland, or disturbed its peace in any other way, there would for sure be protests from countless Dutch people as well as from foreign experts and people appreciating the landscape. In twenty-five years we will understand these things even better than we do now. If only it isn’t too late.”

Jac. P. Thijsse, 1929.

How can we listen to a landscape that no longer exists? How can we reconstruct sounds from before, and what do they tell us about natural changes in the landscape, as well as relentless capitalist expansion, colonial histories, and harmed ecosystems? What will we be hearing in this area in the future?

The day before we started our Rhine River rehearsal journey, I cycled along the Meuse River to Hoek van Holland. I stumbled upon a small petting zoo with caged birds and other animals such as sheep and donkeys, making loud noises when I came closer. To me, it sounded like a collective protest.



Petting zoo at Hoek van Holland. Photo by Loom, 2024.

II.

Over the last months, I had been listening to river recordings from different places, collected over the years by sound artists and composers.

I listened to a record by composer Annea Lockwood, who had been following and recording the Danube River over the course of a few years¹⁴. Along the way she asked people “What is a river?” and “What does the river mean to you?”, while playing back and recording their answers in their respective native languages underwater. I met with researcher and sound artist Zahra Malkani, and listened to the recordings she made along the Malir river in Pakistan



Scan the QR code to hear:
Hoek van Holland petting zoo

14 Annea Lockwood, *A Sound Map Of The Danube* (album), Lovely Music, 2008.

15 Shahana Rajani and Zahra Malkani, ‘Notes Toward a Karachi Ecopedagogy. Sensing the Ephemeral Rivers’, 2022.

16 See:
<https://youtu.be/oipowWaEfto>.

17 “If you can focus on how you feel in response to hearing something from the environment, and then become aware that you feel connected to it, you can move into a state where you don’t feel separated from that phenomenon.”

—Annea Lockwood in conversation with Jennifer Lucy Allan in: Irene Revell and Sarah Shin, *Bodies of Sound: Becoming a Feminist Ear*, Silver Press, 2024.

featuring water sounds and voices¹⁵. Unlike official maps of the territory that bear no traces of indigenous communities living with the river, the recordings offer an alternative representation. In Oslo, I met with Sami artist Margrethe Pettersen, who swam and recorded the Chemnitz river in her performance Láibmat II, as part of her *Remembering with Rivers* project¹⁶. Four bodies in the water, holding each other, drifting and listening vertically: with one ear in and one ear outside the water. During our Rhine River Rehearsal, we also listened to fragments of *rhein_strom*, recorded soundscapes by artists Thomas Siefert and Lasse-Marc Riek, who have been listening to the Rhine River for several years. While at first, the sounds of flowing water in the different recordings sounded similar to me, over time I started to hear different orientations towards the river landscape and their human and non-human inhabitants. Different types of relations to the river that the recordings seem to convey, from more direct ways of listening to river soundscapes, to offering a sonic context for a conversation about the river, to a performance in which the artist and riverscape were sounding together. While listening to these different orientations, Annea Lockwood’s question ‘What is a river?’ sounded more and more like a riddle to me.

Following—and deviating from—the Rhine during our rehearsal journey, we discussed the river as a construct. As a line drawn on a map. As a constructed landscape through the shaping and straightening of the river delta. (While I write this, I imagine the sound of excavators and trucks moving sand, and the low hum of cargo ships that we passed during our journey). The river as an object of control. But when I listen to the recordings of the rivers I hear something else. And the longer I listen, boundaries between me as a listener and the object of listening (the river) seem to blur¹⁷. Just like the evening in Valkenburg, when Radna invited us to make a soundwalk.

III.

On the third day of our Rhine River Rehearsal journey, we visited the Hambach Tagebau braun coal mine. Not to be missed on Google Maps as a scar in the landscape, 30 km west from Cologne, and a future Rhine basin or inland lake. Here, at the open pit of the mine, I proposed to listen for a while, and to think about how we understand and position ourselves as listeners. At the same time, I recorded the sounds with my ZOOM recorder. I like how sound artist and scholar Mark Peter Wright writes about a sensibility that he calls ‘listening-with’, emphasizing the complex entanglements between sites and species:

“Listening-with is a critical sensibility that might assist the search for sites and sounds or processes and consequences that are not immediately apparent. It is a mode that seeks to foster critical alliance toward the sounds I hear, or do not hear, rather than approach them as something to listen to or for. Listening-with asserts that there is no singular subject but instead a plethora of ears, bodies, perspectives, recordings, and mediations at stake: stretched across site and species and scaled over thresholds of audibility and equity. Listening-with is not a

celebration of such entanglements. It acknowledges complexity and the consequent demand placed on the ear of the recordist as much as the elsewhere listener, to disentangle and reassemble meaning as an ongoing process of responsibility and ethical commitment.¹⁸

The word ‘elsewhere listener’ continues to resonate with me. While we were listening at the Hambach Tagebau mine, hearing distant noises from trucks driving hundreds of metres deep down in the pit, we all heard other things too. Sounds that we attuned ourselves to over the last days. But also memories from before. I thought I heard sounds from De Beer being excavated in the distance.

Perhaps, while we are listening, we are always also elsewhere listeners. We are carrying unique sonic memories and localities with us. So can we ask ourselves: where are we listening from? How are the things we hear connected to other times and territories? To other processes and struggles?

During our Rhine River Rehearsal journey, I occasionally recorded sounds from our encounters with water, with people we met along the way, as well as parts of our conversations. Later on, I made a short audio collage, overlapping sonic fragments that seemed to ‘speak’ with, against or alongside each other.

What I find interesting about soundscapes and audio collages is that they carry the possibility to hold different localities and temporalities—simultaneously. Within soundscapes, urban and rural sounds, natural or man-made sounds, land and water sounds, overlap, blur, and coexist.

When thinking about Annea Lockwood’s question ‘What is a river?’, I now feel that the question might be an invitation to keep the listening going. Beyond the river as a linear construct, as something that holds a multitude of sounding bodies, sites and temporalities. Something that holds stories of hubris and violence, as well as regeneration and coexistence. But that also includes ourselves as (elsewhere) listeners, who all carry with us our own sonic memories and listening positions.

Questions that I’d like to continue to investigate in the context of the mentioned areas along the Rhine river delta, as well as in other geographies are: *What can we learn from the sound of this landscape? What was sounding here before, what will be sounding here after? What rhythms or cycles do we find? Between day and night, seasons, or cycles in deep time. What noises do we hear? What do we filter out when we listen? How to listen to images, to what we see? In which ways are we always ‘elsewhere listeners’ ourselves? Where are we listening from? How can sound recordings operate as counter-cartographies, as testimonies, as a form of memory activism? Is a recording always a form of extraction too? What if the sound listens back?*

18 Mark Peter Wright, ‘Micologies’, 2023. Check online: <https://www.rewirefestival.nl/feature/micologies>



Scan the QR code to hear:
Rhine River Rehearsal audio collage



Valkenburg Soundwalk. Photo by Loom, 2024



Listening at the Hambach Tagebau mine during the Rhine River Rehearsal journey. Photo by Loom, 2024.



The Resounding River, listening to an audio collage by Katia at the Rhine River Rehearsal: Reimagining a River in Five Acts by Loom, Goethe Instituut, March 5th 2025, Amsterdam. Photo by Maarten Nauw.

The Regenerative River

Mark Minkjan

A nearly thunderous cacophony of insects buzzing and birds chirping drowns out the sound of the occasional car and the many cyclists passing us overhead on the historical river dike protecting the Ooijpolder, just east of the city Nijmegen, from flooding. I was made aware of the biodiverse concert because of Radna's guided listening meditation that helped me ground and become aware of our immediate surroundings, as well as the historical presence of the brickworks and the river.

How did this place sound when it was still a production facility?

We are sitting on the grass between two remaining brick walls of a 19th-century field oven, the most historical type of brick factory, situated here because the riverbanks have always been rich with clay. Plants grow from the eroded, porous, 130 centimetre thick brick walls that provide habitat for bugs and birds. The sixteen firing holes once used to throw burning peat inside the oven to fire the molded bars of clay into bricks, are now larger nesting places for birds and insects. The oven never had a roof, as the pile of bricks would be covered with cut sods of heathland soil before firing, but if you do not know about the structure of field ovens, the two walls may suggest the historical existence of some kind of fortified structure, the association further mystifying our presence as the sun was setting on this first Sunday of September.



The overgrown wall of an abandoned brickworks field oven.
Photo by Loom, 2024

GROUNDING WITH WATER

One of the lenses we applied during our journey was about retracing and imagining how people and other species have lived and will be living on the distinct grounds of riverbanks and in flood-plains, with a specific interest in raw material extraction, biodiversity and regenerative practices. The first day of the Rhine River Rehearsal was partially spent in Ooijpolder, an area located on the left bank of the Waal part of the Rhine. Several other locations

along the (historical) trajectory of the Rhine also informed our understanding of construction and agriculture industries emerging from specific ground conditions, often the direct result of the (former) presence of the river.

Historically, the river has had a regenerative quality, flooding farm-land in wintertime to provide nutrients for the soil. Later, more binary water engineering was established, containing rivers and keeping the water from flooding the land, and artificial fertiliser came to regulate soil productivity. Industrial-scale farming was born.

The ground has also, always, provided construction materials for shelter. Industrialisation has escalated this process, too. The brick is one of the main protagonists of the modern construction industry, and a direct product of wetness.

BRICKWORKS

A few kilometres east of the field oven in the same Ooijpolder is the hamlet Erlecom, which used to be situated on the right, or northern, bank before the river was straightened to decrease shipping times and reorganise the land. The castle of Kleverbergh, which existed at least since 1343, suddenly found itself on the other side of the river. It disappeared in an 18th-century flood, after which the location hosted a farm before a brickworks was built in the 19th century. The remnants of the factory, which was discontinued in the 1970s, are now being repurposed to become part of a regenerative estate with the aim to establish a flourishing ecosystem of humans and other species, while restoring soil health.

The brick factory existed, together with several others in the polder, due to the presence of river clay, a result of sedimented mineral particles of eroded stone carried downriver from the Alps. The bendy nature of this part of the river makes for a lot of historical sediment.



Claypit in Erlecom, about 500 metres south of the river.
(source: Google Earth)



A brick is a river without water. Solidified fluidity. Seen like that, we could perhaps say that we already inhabit the river.

A typical modern brick factory operates a 100-to-250 meter long tunnel kiln through which the dried chunks of clay are pulled at around 1400 degrees. These kilns are usually in operation 24/7, continuously burning fossil fuels.

Today, the factory in Erlecom is part of the Wienerberger conglomerate, the largest brick producer in the world. Wienerberger bricks are ubiquitous in the construction industry and can be found in consumer hardware stores. The Erlecom factory produces Waalformaat bricks, historically named after this part of the Rhine river and currently the industry size standard for bricks in the Netherlands. The clay extraction still happens mostly locally, close to the factory, but the bricks are used elsewhere and profits flow to foreign shareholders.

CUTTING UP THE LAND

To source clay for the bricks, straightforward clay pits are dug in by removing topsoil of the river banks to reach the clay 20 centimetres below. These quarry sites, usually situated close to a brick factory, are obviously destructive to ecosystems because topsoil contains multitudes of lifeforms. Old photos of Ooijpolder, where many clay pits have been dug in the past two centuries, show the excavation sites. The landscape was riddled with barren, darkish brown muddy fields up to two metres deep. These are the open wounds of the anthropocene, the sublimely horrifying negative spaces of modernity and our compulsion to grow indefinitely.

In the last decades of the 19th century, a passer-by would hear the murmurs of the many labourers, and the thumps and slashes of their spades sliding into the earth, producing a dull crackle ripping the many small roots underneath to release the clay. In the 1920s, these up-close sounds would be drowned out by the high-pitched motor of the electrified excavator and its rattling chains driving the bucket wheel, which would replace many of the diggers.

Dozens of clay pits are still visible in the landscape today. The most recent and currently largest one emerged in the 21st century close to Kleverbergh to enable the production of millions of bricks as well as the sourcing of sand.

BOOMING BIODIVERSITY

Older clay pits from which the mining activities have moved away that have not been filled in with soil, have turned into shallow ponds which are now among the most biodiverse parts of the Dutch landscape. Shallow waters and puddle-marsh zones that form the gradient border between land and water, are generally richest in biodiversity. Where is the border between land and water and how much life happens in between? The excavation wounds in the ground have grown a dense tissue of life precisely because of wetness.

Brick production functions at the expense of the local soil and biodiversity, while its emissions contribute to further destruction of ecosystems. Ironically, the remaining clay pits are almost the

opposite. In comparison to the detrimental effects of the construction industry, these are just small compensating patches, but they are reminders that after human activity nature can quickly flourish and heal the scars in the land. Regeneration seems to happen if we don't get involved too much.

SCALELESS

In the next two days, we experienced a similar regenerative dynamic in two other mining sites, only to increase exponentially in scale. I cannot quite describe the last: the Hambach open-pit coal mine we visited on the third day of our journey. Saying it covers nearly 50km2 with a bottom at 500 metres into the earth does not convey the meaning of such unearthing operations. Even standing on its edge does not, as it is beyond proportion. The energy company RWE purchases the homes of people in adjacent villages that end up finding themselves on a cliff, so that it can continue to expand the mine. Seeing Bagger 293, the world's largest bucket-wheel excavator at 96 metres tall and 225 metres wide does not help either.



The coal excavator Braunkohlebagger 293 in the Hambach opencast mine
(Souce: Interesting Engineering)

The plan is to have the mine fill up with water from the Rhine running about 30 kilometres West, a process that will take 100 years. Visions of leisure, nature and renewable energy are being dreamed up by Zukunftsagentur Rheinisches Revier (Rheinland Region Future Agents), but these proposals, too, cannot make any of it less improbable.

GRAVEL PIT

Let us therefore skip back to the day before, when we suddenly found ourselves standing in front of a nearly 20-metre high wall of earth that was more comprehensible, after we lowered ourselves into a gravel pit in Belfeld. All thanks to Joep Pijnenburg, the sole mine operator who is soon to retire and spent most of his working life in the pit. We encountered him at a raised cabin surrounded by machines for digging, lifting and sifting the ground on the bottom of the pit.

Sent ahead by foot in the hot summer sun to get a good sense of the place, the steep cut in the earth loomed over us as we walked to the far side of the mine. A vertical timeline, functioning as a cross-section of millions of years of sedimentation. As we stood



there reading the geological infographic—to see the top 15 metres of sand which have been carried downstream by the Rhine River (which used to run here but migrated north) over the past 600.000 years, and the two metres of clay below that, the sediment of around two million years ago when this area on the Dutch-German border was still sea—the approaching heavy rumble of a diesel-powered engine made us look back to see Joep coming over in a wheel loader truck the size of a building. Standing next to the yellow-and-black machine made it easier to understand the scale of excavation happening here, as well as the energy required to do so.



Geological infographic in Belfeld quarry (Left). Guided tour of Belfeld quarry by supervisor Joep Pijnenburg (Right). Photos by Loom, 2024

This is the last remaining quarry on the Tegelen fluvial terrace, a riser in the landscape once pushed up by the Rhine. From Roman times to the early 20th century clay was dug up here by hand. Over the last centuries, large quantities of fossils were cautiously unearthed, making it a gold mine for scientists finding petrified panthers, hyena's, mammoths and macaques. 20th century mechanisation caused many fossils to be lost, but in the past decades more careful shoveling made it a site of research again. Clay is still being dug up here, used to fire roof tiles in another factory of the Wienerberger conglomerate about a kilometre north of where we were thumbing lumps of clay pulled from the bottom of the mine.

Here, too, the hunger for raw materials has destroyed ecosystems over the course of a few decades. Large parts of the forest have been cut down to utilise and monetise the various soil types below. Ironically, or inspiringly, falcons and swallows have nested in the quarry's walls, providing a perfect habitat.

Quarries have migrated around the few square kilometres of the terrace, opening the earth, emptying it of desired materials, closing it again or letting water fill it up, moving to the next promising lands to unearth. The part just north of the Belfeld mine is now a lake. Its sandy bank was used as a recreational beach, but has been closed because of littering and nuisance for birds and other animals (the state forestry department runs the area and leases it to the mining company). The miners have made the beach less accessible by dumping more clay in order to get more reed, bushes and trees to grow for it to be handed over to nature once more. Forestry is engineering. So is leaving room for other than human species in this

world. The southern part shows clay and gravel pits filled with water. Also here, a resurged forest, as well as a EuroParcs resort with bungalows nested around three of the pit-ponds. Mining proves to be good groundwork for leisure.

COOPERATIVE REGENERATION

The recently founded regenerative Kleverbergh estate is not the only cooperative, non-extractive organisation founded to revitalise the soil and equally benefitting non-human and human life. Many have sprung in the past couple of years in The Netherlands alone, with an ambition to acquire more than a third of the country’s agricultural land. Alternative forms of land ownership are the foundation for many of them. Investments from a community wider than those directly working with or benefiting from these initiatives mostly yield returns in terms of healthy ecosystems, rather than financial ones. Their founding principles include, for example, soil fertility for the next seven generations, commons guidelines, or nonhuman representation in decision making. They are exploring new—or probably very old—ways to generate life and value locally and for more-than-human purposes.

REGENERATIVE BUILDING MATERIALS

The Kleverbergh estate, which at the time of writing has secured crowdfunding, will construct buildings out of regenerative and biobased materials. This is in line with a wider shift in architecture where people are finding refuge from emissions in practices foregrounding regionally sourced and minimally processed materials with far fewer emissions. Earth plays a role in this, as it has for millennia, with more and more buildings being realised today using raw earth and clay as a building material, in the form of rammed walls, compressed bricks or as a layer of plaster to smoothen walls and create healthy indoor climates. The carbon emissions of the construction process are only a fraction of heavily, often (petro-) chemically processed materials such as concrete, steel and plastics. In its purest form we could imagine a home partially constructed from the ground on its site, far smaller in scale than the clay pits that were dug for fire bricks transported elsewhere, with the hole dug for the building’s material becoming its cellar.

Ooijpolder and specifically the possible future of De Kleverbergh and similar initiatives shows an evolution of grounded practices shaped by the presence of the river, moving away from extractive, export-oriented construction (or agriculture) industries to more locally invested, regenerative approaches. These approaches start from soil health and biodiversity, living with the land and the water, rather than at the expense of the land and trying to keep the water out. They are exploring both traditional approaches and experimental attempts to be grounded with water that may help us to deal with the realities of tomorrow.

MOVING GROUND

The earth has continuously been opened and closed for the usefulness of the ground below us, on river banks and flood plains in particular. Just as a meandering river, nibbling away at the outer banks in the bend of a river and leaving transported sediment on its inner bends, humans have meandered along, getting close to the



river (or where it once ran) in search of rich ground. Just as how the river moves sediment to wet grounds, people move around the ground dug up here, dried, sifted, fired or otherwise processed in order to use or sell it elsewhere.

Regeneration is about regrowing what has been lost before.

Mines are ecological disasters, deemed necessary for the way we made the modern world. While the biodiversity upsurge after periods of depriving excavations is lush and hopeful, the question always remains if regrowth compensates for what was lost and has been emitted in the process.

But regrowth cannot happen at the speed of modern digging. Rivers leave around 2.5 millimetres of sediment annually. Clay layers in the soils we visited are 2000 millimetres thick; they are cut away in the blink of an eye. A renewable resource, but not on the timescale of a modernised society.

Materials that regrow faster may sustain human life in a more balanced way, towards making a living without depletion. Unfired clay used in the construction of buildings (compressed bricks or loam plaster, for example) dissolves when left to the elements, returning to soil ecologies. Traditional fired bricks cannot return to their previous state, and they easily stay around for centuries. But the ultimate regeneration is always looming, with water coming at us from all sides. When the deluge comes, what was the landscape anyway? On the riverbank next to the Ooijpolder Wienerberger factory, we found used bricks, polished down and sculpted into blobby objects by the flow of the river, the seemingly indestructible brick eroded by the water as if it were soft clay again.

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The Embodied River

Radna Rumping

When I see a map, I wander.

The map—with squiggly and taut lines, shades of colour, place names, an explanatory legend—is not there to make me wander, rather it is there to show the way, or at least help me on my way.

I don't participate, I zone out, and now, I wonder why. It is not impossible to read the map, though it certainly takes some effort on my part. Why am I turned off?

There are more types of information that I wander away from and not fully commit to, I think of:

Enumerations of facts;
Series of numbers;
Explanations of dimensions and proportions;
Floor plans;
Manuals in small print;
YouTube tutorials (unless there really is no other way).

A river is not easy to capture. Yes, there is the image of a meandering line—almost symbolic, that is how you draw a river. But a river like the Rhine always manages to slip away and assume other forms, other names even. Both on the map and in 'real life'.

Since I could not get my hands on the Rhine beforehand—and this time I did try my best, tilting my head to read the map, tracing my finger along the line, leaving greasy stains on the screen, only to come to the conclusion that the Rhine is not so much a line, but rather a branching area—I decided to prepare our trip a little differently. Not from a specific location or elaborate plan, but rather from an attitude and a series of exercises, contributing to a practice I dub 'embodied research'.

I view embodied research as a form of inquiry, in which there remains a porosity between the contemplating body and the environment, or that which the contemplator wishes to investigate; in this case, living with the Rhine, and wetness—the liminal area between land and water. When we, as Loom, attempt to make the rigid categorization regarding water/land more fluid, and less binary or normative, what attitude of ourselves is then appropriate?

In embodied research, the subject/object position is not fixed. There is a constant interaction between acting and undergoing. Undergoing implies an allowing. Allowing to be affected.

In much research, even in forms called 'artistic research', the researcher uses methods in which they remain somewhat at a distance or deploy only a few senses: in field research the emphasis is often on reading information and visually mapping or measuring

an environment. Nowadays, this is all the easier with a smartphone camera always within arm’s reach. The supposedly neutral and rather observant attitude has been extensively criticized and dismantled in both science and the arts, and although the awareness might be there, a combination of alertness and practical tools is needed to arrive at more holistic forms of research.

Wait, now this is all getting a bit too general.

Let me speak for myself: as a curator, organizer and advisor working mostly in the visual arts (in different contexts, in relation to daily life and the world outside of gallery spaces), I noticed that somehow, I often stayed at a safe and contemplative distance. I wanted to put myself more on the line instead, to share a vulnerability—writing and developing an artistic practice myself partly opened that space. Another expansion is that, in recent years, I started participating in embodied practices to get to know my different senses better and to practice improvisation.

How to arrive at other forms that help map an environment in flux? How can multiple senses and sources (more subjective, imagined, subconscious) be activated? How to be prepared to improvise? For my contribution to our collective research around the Rhine, I drew inspiration from artistic practices affiliated with performance, dance, and sound art. Some of these practices I know through reading about them, others through actively experiencing them myself. From these I have distilled several exercises and taken them on the Rhine River Rehearsal.

Line Piece

Draw a line with yourself.
Go on drawing until you disappear.

Yoko Ono, 1964 spring

Water Piece

Steal a moon on the water with a bucket.
Keep stealing until no moon is seen on the water.

Yoko Ono, 1964 spring

From these practices, some scores have been precisely recorded and authored by artists. They belong to the Western canon of art history: think of the Fluxus movement or composers and choreographers who were influential in developments in conceptual art. However, there are also exercises that rather ‘circulate’; the originator or exact instruction cannot always be traced. One can feel free to be loose with the exercises: adapting them, remixing them and passing them on again.

19 Specifically chapter 4. Walking Bodies, Elena Biserna, Going Out – Walking Listening Soundmaking, umland editions, 2022.

An interesting reference is Going Out¹⁹, by Elena Biserna from 2022. In this anthology, she describes artistic practices around walking, listening and soundmaking—paying attention to the canon, but also to positionality and intersectionality. The typical flaneurs were mostly white and male, as were the Situationists with their dérives. But what does walking as an artistic practice mean for women, Black people, or bodies with disabilities?



Cover and spread from Going out – Walking, Listening, Soundmaking, Elena Biserna (red.), 2022

Let me speak for Loom, not in the way we usually present ourselves by saying something about our professional backgrounds, but rather from positionality; how we are bodies in an environment: we are five white people who grew up in the Netherlands, part man and woman, part straight and queer, with bodies able enough to go for uninhibited walks as an artistic practice. At least one of us would not walk alone through a quiet landscape at night (that would be me). There is more to say, but this gives some context to how we were present, and could possibly be read, during our journey along the Rhine last summer.

Moving as slowly as possible, step forward with the heel to the ground first. Let the weight of the body shift alongside the outside edge of the foot to the small toe and across the large toe.

As the weight of that foot fully aligns with that foot then begin the transition of another foot.

Small steps are recommended as balance may be challenged.

Maintain good posture, with shoulders relaxed and head erect.

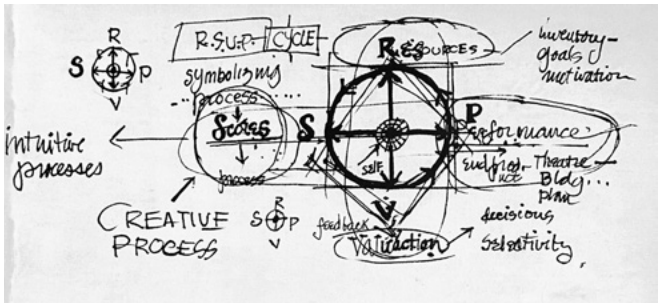
Use your breathing.

The challenge for this exercise is that no matter how slow you are walking, you can always go slower.

Pauline Oliveros, 1998

In a broader sense, I would like to refer to the work of choreographer and dancer Anna Halprin (1920-2021) and her partner, landscape architect Lawrence Halprin (1916-2009). Together they developed a method summarized in their book The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment from 1969. In this

method, scores are part of a collaborative creative process that leads to new information that members of a group respond to and work with in a continuous cycle.



The RSVP Cycles, detail from cover

Sidenote: here, I can draw a meandering line of body-to-body transmission, since I'm aware that artist and choreographer Simone Forti studied and moved with Anna Halprin in the 1950's on the so-called 'dance deck' (designed by Lawrence Halprin) built outdoors on a wooded hillside in Marin County, California. And I became familiar with the practice of Simone Forti through moving and talking with artist Jeremiah Day in Berlin—who moved and collaborated with Simone Forti before. Just as a river, we cannot grasp this exactly, it is a practice that keeps flowing and evolving within different contexts.



Radna holding an image of Simone Forti, during an improvised presentation at Rhine River Rehearsal: Reimagining a River in Five Acts by Loom, Goethe Instituut, March 5th 2025, Amsterdam (cropped from photo by Maarten Nauw).

Interview with Simone Forti²⁰, from 2021, when she's in her eighties:

The interviewer: What are you thinking about with your body these days?

SF: I feel we're on the crest of a wave and I feel it in my body that we're going to fall over and down and the wave is going to break.

The interviewer: As a culture, you mean?

SF: Yeah.

20 Ross Simonini, An Interview With Simone Forti, 2021 (<https://rosssimonini.substack.com/p/an-interview-with-simone-forti>)

She talks about a culture, but I will stay with the crest of a wave. And her emphasis on: I feel it in my body.

During the Rhine River Rehearsal, we kicked off with some exercises, in between driving, visiting places, and discussing. We lay with eyes closed on the ground in the grass next to the ruins of a brick factory in the Ooijpolder for a 'collective dream travel', remembering images where land and water touched. In Valkenburg, we headed out for a soundwalk where we did not speak ourselves, listening to the flowing water of the Geul, the murmur of day-trippers and traffic, and a silence that became stronger and stronger as we climbed a hill at the edge of town. At the Loreley rock along the Rhine near Sankt Goarshausen, where a bus of tourists had just disembarked, we first each took in our surroundings followed by an automatic writing exercise—after which we read the texts to each other, written from both observation and underbelly.



Loom arriving at the Ooijpolder during the Rhine River Rehearsal. Photo by Loom, 2024.

Embodied research enhances an awareness for experiencing places in the here and now, and contributing to how we can imagine these places differently in the future. By stretching out ways of perception, and actively practicing improvisation, we can collaboratively develop a fluid intelligence that helps us look beyond vested interests and specific positions—moving into the possibilities of relating, in this case, differently to the rising and falling water.



Reimagining a river in five acts: reflections

On 5 March 2025, the Rhine River Rehearsal: Reimagining a River in Five Acts invited participants to become part of a dress rehearsal and scenography at the Goethe-Institut Amsterdam, to reimagine our position as part of the Rhine river delta. Through sonic, spatial, spoken and visual elements, participants gathered and moved around five different approaches to the river, asking ourselves how to live in a world of ubiquitous wetness.

The five acts—from the ubiquitous river, the unruly river, the resounding river, the regenerative river to the embodied river—were followed by responses from Dirk Sijmons, former state landscape architect of the Netherlands and responsible for the Room for the River programme, and Zahra Malkani, multidisciplinary artist and researcher, exploring the politics of development, displacement, and dispossession through the lens of dissident ecological knowledges and environmental resistance.

Transcript of responses by Dirk Sijmons and Zahra Malkani:

Michiel: As this is a confluence of different views, of different understandings of the river, we were hoping to continue the flow, into other domains, into other bodies of knowledge, other experiences and that's why we asked two special guests, landscape architect Dirk Sijmons and multidisciplinary artist Zahra Malkani. Maybe you would like to give it a try, to respond to what we witnessed all together. And maybe you could think out loud what this would mean for you, and for your dealings with the river and wetness, and where these ideas could flow next.

Dirk Sijmons: Thank you all for this dress rehearsal, and for bringing up the existential questions we are faced with in the coming years, decennia, and possibly millenia. The first thing that comes up to me in regards to exercises or rehearsals like these, are German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's "Übungen" or 'exercises' for other worldviews, asking how to practice other worldviews. And that's what we have been seeing, and I think it is very necessary to construct new kinds of empathies with the non-human world.

My trip to the river started in the early 80's when I was working for the National Forest Service, and together with colleagues we made a plan for rewilding the delta area. I'm not telling this to boast, but this was a very influential plan that took a new view on the river. Until that day, the river was considered by ecologists, biologists etcetera with a sort of Dutch exceptionalism. Because our floodplains didn't have bushes and trees, which is specific for The Netherlands.

I still remember De Beer, when many of you weren't born yet.

The generation before me has seen a Waddenzee which was extremely different, and which had seagrass fields. Our generation has never seen that. When we come into a discussion, we put the year counter on zero, and we don't remember what was there before. Maps like the ones shown today of the Mississippi river make us remember what the river was.

So we made a plan—and now I must say something about the tricks of the plan—where the dynamics of the river were allowed to invade the agricultural room of the floodplain, because that was the reason that there were no trees. It was a sort of overgrazed prairie, and it had been an overgrazed prairie since the beginning of the 15th century. Our oldest maps didn't show trees in the floodplains. We thought this was an exception, but we discovered that if you give the river functional space, and more time and surface, it will glow, and nature will come in like a squatter movement, and we showed that this really worked. But in the tight corset of the river, the river management said well if you're making woods outside of the dike, this is a sort of resistance to the water, and the sediment, and you can't do it.

But we said, if we can compensate for it by digging pits in the floodplain, and give it to the people who produce the fantastic beautiful bricks shown here, we can compensate for it. So we needed the brick companies to compensate for the woods that came up. That was a first trend crack in looking at the river.

The second trend crack was with the 1993 and 1995 extreme high water. This was a beautiful opportunity that lasted for 10-15 years—we know it has been closed down lately I'm afraid—that people from a policy level were allowed to think that this climate change is not something that ends in 2050, not in 2100, it is a generational thing we have to deal with.

I think that the kind of dress rehearsals that are shown here today are absolutely urgent to change the mind set. To not only look differently at the rivers, but also differently at the factor time.

Dirk Sijmons

So let's give more room to the river, while we still can. Because there was this other thought, that if you look at the world map, all the deltas of the world are the great attractors, and the last places people will go. I think this is something that in the next 100 or 200 years will characterize the delta. These will be places where people from desertification areas in the world will flee to, so regarding immigration, we haven't seen anything yet. This is a good reason to give more room to the river now, because in 50 or 100 years, urbanization might even further tighten the corset of the river. I think that the kind of dress rehearsals that are

shown here today are absolutely urgent to change the mind set. To not only look differently at the rivers, but also differently at the factor time. We are all mindful as we sit here, but we also have to be more timeful as we sit here. The intergenerational vision on the river and the delta needs a change in worldview.

The Ganges is not just a river, but the Ganges is also a goddess, a deity, who is imagined as a ubiquitous presence, and is worshipped and revered as such.

Zahra Malkani

Zahra Malkani: This was a very helpful entry into the river, also for myself as I'm new to this country and this context. I haven't quite attuned myself to this ecology and landscape yet. I was especially interested in the conversation and reference to ubiquitous wetness, as I'm also inspired by the work of Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha in my own practice, which is related to the river. Maybe I'll start with giving a little bit more context about that. I also come from a delta, which is the Indus delta.

The Indus delta is the fifth largest delta in the world, and it is perhaps the most devastated delta. While it was once an incredibly rich delta, there aren't many people living there now, as it had probably one of the largest climate migrations that happened in the world. A few years ago, I spoke to people who knew the landscape, and they said that they don't remember the last time the river met the sea. This changed a few years ago, with the catastrophic floods of 2022. The Indus delta ends at the devastated part of the delta, but it begins in the Himalayas, which is home to the largest cluster of glaciers in the world. With climate change and melting glaciers, this landscape is becoming even more vulnerable.

Over the last years, I have started to divide my life between Pakistan and The Netherlands, a landscape in which you can sometimes forget that the world seems to be ending. But there are places where not even for a moment you can forget that. It is constantly present. In that context, I was really moved by seeing a couple of the images that you shared over here. The connection in how that devastation ever happened, is of course by the colonial history of the creation of river containment technologies like dams, canals, by the long British colonization that we had, and the legacy of these modern containment technologies, which to an extent has been exported to the rest of the world from this specific country. These are water technologies and water knowledges and epistemologies that emerged around the Rhine River. So there is a very direct connection that might not always be visible or part of conversations, but I think a conversation around ubiquitous wetness helps to understand this better.

I was especially moved by the images where the idea of ubiquitous wetness becomes present in the form of what looks like a

flood. But the way you spoke about it was really interesting, because there is also a certain ease with how the flood is being inhabited in places like Grietherort.

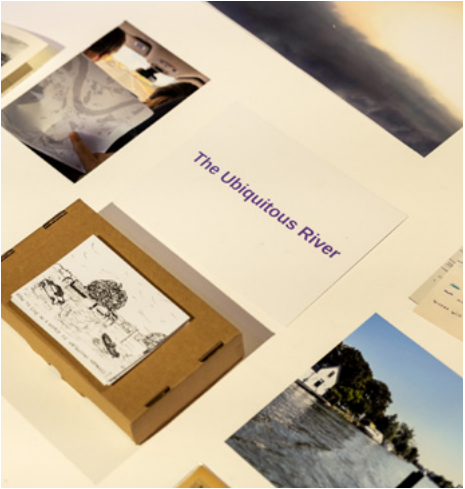
When Dilip Da Cunha speaks of ubiquitous wetness, he is not only speaking of that moment of the flood, but ubiquitous wetness exists even prior to the flood. How it is part of the local consciousness around the river, as he for instance talks about the example of the Ganges river in India, and how the Ganges is not just a river, but the Ganges is also a goddess, a deity, who is imagined as a ubiquitous presence, and is worshipped and revered as such. That really connected with me because that's the same for the Indus. The Indus is also considered a deity.

I thought this was really interesting in connection to the images of the Loreley. The Ganges is imagined as a female goddess, sometimes also gender fluid, but it's interesting to see that the Lorelei is being represented as this figure who is available for submission, and that there is a soft presence to how she is imagined and represented. Which is in really stark contrast to the Ganges, who is imagined as a mighty and merciful goddess who has to be feared.

I was also moved by the imagery of the bricks, and the idea of the brick as a river, to understand the idea of ubiquitous wetness, or the ways in which wetness becomes ubiquitous when it travels. Something that is also very common in Pakistan at the Indus River and other rivers is sand mining. This is one of the reasons why the river ecology has been really devastated. The sand mining goes on to create concrete, to construct cities in Pakistan, and outside of Pakistan as well. In the same way, the river becomes this ubiquitous presence.

So I'm thinking about the ways in which it is really clear and visible how Europe and European thought around rivers has built and reimagined landscapes in the Global South. But I'm also really curious about how these same colonial encounters have built the landscapes and the rivers [in the Global North]. So how is the Rhine River specifically constructed by those encounters? You could map the river dams and even the Rhine onto South Asian rivers, but how can we map those rivers onto this specific landscape? And how do you find that, as much as these landscapes in the Global South are built by colonial encounters, how have the landscapes been troubled by those colonial encounters as well.

I'm thinking about the ways in which it is really clear and visible how Europe and European thought around rivers has built and reimagined landscapes in the Global South



Impressions of Rhine River Rehearsal at Goethe-Institut Amsterdam on March 5, 2025. Photos by Maarten Nauw, 2025.

Appendix

WETNESS WALKS

As a way of collectively engaging with ubiquitous wetness, we've been organizing Wetness Walks in different locations as a way to collectively experience fluid spaces and landscapes.



Wetness Walk around the North Sea coast near Velsen.
Photo by Loom, 2022

#1

Four Thursdays in September 2022

Wetness Walk from Amsterdam to IJmuiden

The first Wetness Walk over 4 days from Amsterdam to the North Sea, with students from the Architecture department of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. Walking collectively from the Zeedijk, a former sea dike in Amsterdam's historic city center, across the busy port of Amsterdam and the low-lying polders, to a pier stretching hundreds of meters into the North Sea, while discussing, analyzing, mapping, drawing and experiencing wetness. Guests who joined us included curator Mariette Dölle, architect and researcher Lada Hršak, journalist and writer Tracy Metz and artist Marjolijn Boterenbrood.

#2

15 October 2024

Wetness Walk in Amsterdam, from the Herengracht to the IJ river

In collaboration with the Goethe-Institut Amsterdam, we walked from the Herengracht to the Amstel river, to the highest parts of Amsterdam and to the IJ river. Along the way we discussed histories and futures of water and wetness in Amsterdam, including Amsterdam's dependency on and control over the water as a port town and colonial power. While walking we looked for signs that Amsterdam is becoming increasingly vulnerable to the effects of

climate change. Situated in the lowest part of the Rhine river delta, close to the North Sea, the city is threatened from two sides: by the water coming from the Alps and from rising sea levels. At the same time it is experiencing extensive periods of heavy rain, causing flash floods, and long intervals with almost no rain and severe droughts.

#3
16 October 2024

Wetness Walk at the Hambach Tagebau open-cast coal mine
We gathered together with a group of artists part of the Borderland Residencies programme at the open-cast Hambach Tagebau mine: a still-in-use braun coal mine, transitioning into a future Rhine river basin and inland lake. Here, we engaged with deep time, discussing how this area was once water, how fossils formed over time, and how we have been excavating and exploiting the landscape for fossil fuels. And now, how this landscape will turn into water once more, if regional plans proceed. Meanwhile, surrounding communities are protesting against the romanticised future of the area as a tourist attraction, while raising questions about its harmed ecologies. After gathering at the mine, we watched the poetic and powerful film *Sounds for a Wounded Landscape* (2023), by Oliver Gather and Fauke Berg, in which two sound artists play and listen into the large hole of the nearby Garzweiler open-cast mine. We continued the conversation on a hill in Merzenich, overseeing the area and speculating about its uncertain and contested future.

#4
14 November 2024

Wetness Walk around Noordereiland in Rotterdam
In November, we made a Wetness Walk around the Noordereiland in Rotterdam, together with the Studio for Immediate Spaces (Sandberg Institute), around this island in the Maas (Meuse) river. This area is called 'Buitendijks gebied', which means that it is not protected by dikes and is exposed to high waters. The island emerged when the Noorderhaven was excavated in the 1870s. Every year, between mid October and April, the storm season arrives, bringing with it occasional flooding, which will occur more often in the not-so-distant future. We met at the Stuurhut community centre, together with Ellen van Bodegom and Yasmin Stip from 'Iedereen Aan Boord', who work towards a 'self-sufficient' Noordereiland and foster collective awareness about living with water, and high tides at the island. Unexpectedly, the water was very low when we were there, and while there was a clearly felt urgency and strong community organizing, there were no clear cut strategies or tactics of how to collectively deal with the rising waters. Ellen van Bodegom told us about how one of the island's residents posed the question to the municipality, whether or not in the long term it would be worth it to save Noordereiland from flooding.

#5
20 November 2024

Wetness Walk at Grietherort – Postponed.
Ironically, due to bad weather conditions, our Wetness Walk on the island of Grietherort together with the participants from the Borderlands Residencies had to be postponed.

EPILOGUE

With the Rhine River Rehearsal, we made an attempt to get closer to the river, while at the same time continuously departing from a dominant narrative, a clear line, a defined territory.

Our journey has formed from personal fascinations, pressing issues and striking markings in the surrounding landscape: wounds of extraction, places recently flooded, a mythical rock.

We slowed down, sped up, read, spoke, listened, swam; we experienced traces of deep time and imagined possible futures.

Physically, we travelled from Alphen a/d Rijn to Sankt Goarshausen in a few days, but mentally we travelled further; to childhood memories, to the Pleistocene, to the Mississippi, to the Indus Delta and to atmospheric rivers yet to come.

We have traveled with each of us carrying different sets of knowledge; although we might not call ourselves water management experts, we do share ideas about the omnipresence of wetness, and the question on how to live with water has long been present in our work. At the same time, we have also travelled as concerned inhabitants of this planet at this moment in time, where, like many others, we feel a different relationship to the environment is necessary. In this sense, the 'rehearsal' invites us to not turn away from the river and look away from the inevitable, but instead to join an exercise in coexistence, a reconciliation.

Taming or straightening the river is not a solution in times of climate crisis. Rather, the river asks us to move with its fluid flow and partly unpredictable energy. This requires porosity, improvisation, a timeful awareness and collaboration. With the Rhine River Rehearsal, we have taken a first step in practising living with the river otherwise. In the coming years, we intend to expand this practice in time and scale, rehearsing with many others together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Rhine River Rehearsal is an initiative of Loom in close collaboration with the Lectorate Art & Spatial Praxis at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Goethe-Institut Niederlande, Borderland Residencies and Campingplatz Grietherort, who all generously supported the project in various ways.

The project is one of the studios of Climate Imaginaries, part of SPRONG: Verbeelding in Transitie, a collaboration by The Lectorate Art & Spatial Praxis at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy (GRA), the Lectorate of the Academy of Theatre and Dance at the Amsterdam University of the Arts (AHK) and the Visual Methodologies Collective at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS).

The project is also a collaboration with the Goethe-Institut Niederlande, who facilitate more porous borders between Germany and the Netherlands, and where we had the pleasure to collaborate with Martin Bach and Viola Karsten. Through the Goethe-Institut, we also joined the Borderlands Residencies programme, a network of art residencies in the European border region of North Rhine-Westphalia, where we took part as a nomadic residency. Here we collaborated with Judith Anna Schmidt and Valentijn Jansen, who hosted us at Campingplatz Grietherort, where living with wetness is already common practice.

We would also like to thank Ingrid Misterek-Plagge, Joep Vossebeld, Pia Steffen from Borderlands Residencies, and Lene ter Haar and Nathalie Sofie Schulz who curated and organized the exhibition at Art Düsseldorf and Weltkunstzimmer.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude for the generous involvement of two special guests who responded to our Rhine River Rehearsal presentation on 5 March: Dirk Sijmons, former state landscape architect and main architect and chair of the Room for the River Programme, to provide more space for the major rivers to manage the higher water levels in the delta area in The Netherlands. And multidisciplinary artist and researcher Zahra Malkani, who explores the politics of development, displacement, and dispossession through the lens of dissident ecological knowledges and environmental resistance. We also appreciated the spontaneous input from Joep Pijnenburg from whom we learned about Belfeld quarry.

Finally, we would like to thank everyone who joined us on a Wetness Walk, or at the Rhine River Rehearsal programme in Amsterdam. We hope to continue to prepare for living with water and ubiquitous wetness with you.

Front cover: Mixing water from the Rhine with water from the Meuse River near Elsloo. Photo by Loom, 2024

Back cover: Wetness Walk around Grietherort. Photo by Loom, 2024

Drawing by Michiel van Iersel

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The Rhine River Rehearsal is an artistic research project by Loom – practice for cultural transformation, engaging with the Rhine River as a complex and ever-changing environment that is both affected by and contributing to a rapidly changing climate. During the summer of 2024, the five people of Loom followed and deviated from the river, while engaging with the multitude of communities occupying its (past and future) banks, its soil, water and non-human habitats. They challenge the notion of the river as a line, questioning dichotomies between land and water, center and periphery and urban and rural, while absorbing a multiplicity of languages that surround the river, as well as past and future floodings and boundaries of the Rhine that continuously redefine the river.

Rhine River Rehearsal: Reimagining a river was edited by Katia Truijten, Mark Minkjan, Michiel van Iersel, Radna Rumping and René Boer in collaboration with Goethe-Institut Niederlande, the Lectorate Art & Spatial Praxis at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Borderland Residencies and Campingplatz Grietherort, who also supported the project.

