AS THE WATER FLOWS

SENSING REALITIES OF SAFETY: MANAGING AND PERCEIVING FLOODRISK IN MILLINGEN AAN DE RIJN

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PREFACE

Ever since I can remember I walked along the riverbank of the Rhine, holding my father's hand, touching the water with the tip of my toes, playing with our dogs. The river had curved her way along the path I walked. It was right where it belonged, I didn't know any better. It was part of this place I called home, a small Dutch village that goes by the name of Millingen aan de Rijn.

However, the more precarious ways of the river remained unknown territory to me for the larger part of my life, with the occasional exception when water levels would rise to a point where the river would force her way into the talk of the town. This would then relate back to the forced evacuation in 1995, that I – experiencing it at the age of four – can only vaguely recall.

It was when I returned to my parent's house to embark on my fieldwork, equipped with an academically trained, anthropological gaze, that I became aware of the ways in which "my village" had manifested its roots in the river. The acquired gaze added a new dimension to my hometown, and like a painting that is being made, new meanings came into existence with every layer of information I gathered, analyzed and added to the foundations of the canvas I chose to work with.

Fieldwork is often characterized as an intense process, and returning to my hometown with new intentions and a rather large camera raised my awareness on this matter even more. Up to the point where I began my research I had remained rather anonymous within the village and this was something I liked. In fact, I never really felt a connection with Millingen aan de Rijn, except for the fact that my house and my parents were located in these surroundings. Going back home would change everything, I knew, and this amplified the intensity of my fieldwork in ways I could not have imagined beforehand.

Looking back at the two months of fieldwork that were added to twenty-three years of experiences, memories, knowledge and sentiments that reside in Millingen aan de Rijn, I am immensely grateful for this research opportunity that was granted to me. It enabled me to develop myself in the academic and personal realms of life, urging me to connect the two and let them unfold to their full potential.

I am proud to present my research, through which I hope to share the insights I have gained and the meanings that were created consequently. Before doing so, I want to thank my parents from the bottom of my heart for taking care of me and providing the stable grounds I needed in these somewhat turbulent times. Also, I want to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Janine Prins, who has been able to feed my creativity and confidence by granting me with unconditional trust and support throughout this trajectory that defined itself through trial and error.

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction of *The Anthropology of Landscape* Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995:2) note how landscape often functions as a framing device on which the study of space and place is brought into view. However, imbued with local meanings and understandings, landscape requires a second reading as a site that is produced through local practices and hence cultural practices (ibid.:1). Tracing back the origins of the concept of landscape itself, Hirsch elaborates on the Dutch history of the concept *landschap* and its painterly origins (ibid.:2). Hirsch argues that 'what came to be seen as landscape was recognized as such because it reminded the viewer of a painted landscape (..)'. This way, the physical (visual) characteristics of the environment created a scenery that reminded people of a painted landscape. Upon this base of reminiscence, people started to mediate between the ideal depicted world as it was imagined and the reality of their environment, striving to adjust the landscape according to depicted ideals by improving its structures (ibid.). But what happens when there are multiple ideal ways concentrated in one locality? Is there room for diversity in environmental, infrastructural policy?

In this research I aim to unravel a variety of environmental discourses that exist in the Dutch village Millingen aan de Rijn. Located next to one of the main rivers in the Netherlands, the Rhine, the inhabitants of Millingen aan de Rijn (from now on: Millingen) have been exposed to numerous policy-inflicted changes in their environment based on measures to enhance water-security. As in the Netherlands, apart from the North Sea, the country needs protection from flooding by rivers too. Dikes in Millingen have accordingly been adjusted, riverbeds have been excavated and 'nature' is under constant reconstruction. Local ideals and memories of landscape are forced to move to the background in order to make room for a continuous flow of change and readjustment or: appropriation.

I argue that the 'logic of imagination' by which the Dutch landscape is constituted (Doevendans et al. 2007) fails to account for the existing social diversity in coping with flood risk. Hence, I try to find out to what extend top-down implemented water management policies affect local lived realities of Millingen aan de Rijn, and thereby I hope to shed light on social consequences that remain out of scope in policy reports (Rijkswaterstaat 2011; 2013). This research describes how changes in the environment of Millingen, caused by the presence of the river and the

established need to control it, affect the way its inhabitants perceive the river in the enactment of their everyday lives. The primary focus is placed on policy-inflicted changes in the village as they proved to be the main source of insecurity and appropriation for its inhabitants.

I will start by exploring how the national discourse on water-security manifests itself in Millingen, and how the local discourse responds to this by describing how inhabitants address the benefits and cautions of water management in their village. I underpin this by studying the way locals perceive the river as part of their lives, as this provides insights into the ways environment becomes meaningful to them. As a result this research presents the practicalities of coping with changes in the environment both from a national and local perspective. It studies how safety is locally reconstructed, and *felt*, while working towards an answer about what water-security encompasses for the inhabitants of Millingen. Following, it will shed light on how water management policies can connect with the local lived realities to enhance a feeling of safety and trust regarding the interventions that take place.

By providing an ethnographic description of policy, perception and environment I aim to give insights into the importance of the environment for the people inhabiting it. By placing people and their environment in a context of change, I will describe how consciously established ways of perceiving environment mediate between cultural, social and individual ways of being in the world. These ways are ultimately aimed, I argue, at sustaining the environment of Millingen as a place called home.

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I have approached my research with a methodology that focuses on anthropological, audiovisual and artistic tools of inquiry. In the course of doing so a tension arose that John Wynne (2010:50) describes as ‘a tension between respecting the people you’ve worked with and contextualizing them’. With this in mind I have chosen for a thesis that will provide a verbally directed description of my research findings. The film that accompanies this is best seen as an exploration of the core of this research; perception studied through sensorial ways of understanding.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The locality in which this research is placed highlights multiple perspectives on water-security in the Netherlands: including policy, perception and environment as core concepts, in the village of Millingen aan de Rijn. It should be emphasized that studying policies and their interventions that try to cope with flood risk is intertwined with studying the environment in which these interventions are implemented and in which inhabitants of the environment perceive what is happening around them. When this is acknowledged it becomes possible to gain insights into the impact of environmental and policy-inflicted changes in relation to the local realities by which the environment gains meaning in the everyday lives of its inhabitants.

POLICY IN ANTHROPOLOGY

The study on socio-cultural dimensions of politics and the policies that stem from it are often placed in a development perspective (Crate 2011). This perspective is characterized by its top-down approach on creating and implementing change within a local setting, causing processes of power, resistance and order to structure the debate around it (ibid.). After numerous policies stemming from this approach failed to generate results that were aimed for, its authoritative stance became critically scrutinized for its disengagement and lack of understanding with the local lived reality (Li 2007). Power, according to Mosse (2006), exhibits itself in the way policy represents a system of thought and signals operational systems in which an expert discourse is being articulated based on interpretations made by authorities (ibid.:940). When these systems carry inconsistencies with local discourses their practices are likely to fail, while local social effects of development interventions and their valued outcomes are concealed. As a result of this critique, policy itself became a site in need for anthropological intervention, for if the anthropological contribution to understanding the functioning and efficacy of policy wanted to be beneficial, it needed to manifest itself in a bottom-up approach (Ferguson 1999) that could bring both expertise and local interpretations into scope (Mosse 2006).

James Ferguson (1990; 1999) advocates this shift in focus by directing his research-analysis into paradigms of local interpretation. By letting the micro-political dimensions of social life take center stage he allows a bottom-up approach to gain ethnographic body and places politics and processes of negotiation at the heart of

anthropology. Arguing that culture is constantly constructed, Ferguson points out the importance of power and the knowledge about it. Power is able to connect the geographical territory of space with the cultural production of people within it, which becomes defined as place (Ferguson 1999). Consequently, there are no rigid boundaries between space and place left, according to Ferguson, who continues by connecting multiple relations of authority in a single political arena that transcends arbitrary distinctions and incorporates multiple places. Within this cultural construction, power relations are open to anthropological inquiry that sheds light on the everyday implementations of policy.

Despite the acknowledged need to reframe the anthropology of policy, Mosse's (2006) analysis indicates that the linearity between discourses, portrayed as nuclear units opposed to one another, is not yet overcome while the search for connection, mutual understanding and mutual agreement is ranked as highly important. The key, according to Ferguson (1999:20), to overcome this problem is to go beyond any linear tradition and accept discourses in the field as coeval phenomena that present no monopoly over the future. It is not about making distinctions but about researching two branches of the same bush (ibid.:102). Following, I approach policy as interventions constituted outside the locally constructed place, that once they become implemented, enter the local arena of negotiation. Acknowledging the construction that occurs opens Millingen up as a place for reflection on the different discourses on water-security and the changes that became manifest in the village.

Anthropological research is able to overcome arbitrary distinctions as soon as it embraces and unravels the cultural constructedness that exists, allowing insights into the foundations of the varying discourses in the field. Crate (2011) adds that the academic foundations of anthropology are possible to bridge local understandings beyond its locality into new methodological approaches that can be applied. Anthropology is able to bring policy effects into scope (Mosse 2006:940), and grants importance to diversity within local reality. Such an anthropological approach not only adjoins the micro and macro levels of policy but also creates room to mediate between discourses and work towards mutual understanding of policy-implemented change. Adopting this approach therefore allows me to study the ways in which the efficacy of policy is understood among inhabitants of Millingen and how it becomes meaningful in the continuation of their everyday lives while being confronted with

continuous changes that enkindle dialogues between national and local discourses on water-security and the need for interventions.

A local approach on policy: How do water management policies affect the environment of Millingen and its inhabitants?

The climate of environmental and policy-implemented change and adaption urges inhabitants to appropriate this into their personal lives accordingly. Placing policy on the national-local nexus highlights processes of negotiation that take place and allows me to study how a cultural history of water management in the Netherlands as *modus operandi* functions locally as a source of knowledge and safety. It questions how national expert interpretations of water-security become intertwined with local interpretations on the subject. Studying the structures in which interpretations collide will present insights into their functioning that reach beyond the realm of the local, granting them wider academic and political significance. Most importantly, it will support an inquiry into how the established need to enhance water-security in the Netherlands affects the environment of Millingen and its inhabitants who perceive the environment in relation to themselves.

PERCEPTION AND THE SENSES

In my research the study of perception helps to understand the dynamics between self and environment. This in turn helps to investigate the impact of policy-implemented changes and the way perception functions in addressing the felt need for safety. Having been granted attention across multiple disciplines, such as cognitive science, neuroscience, psychology, philosophy and social and cultural anthropology (Ignatow 2007), perception is characterized by interdisciplinarity. Moving away from nineteenth century physiologic and philosophic experiments on the subjective nature of perception, cultural anthropology approached perception as embodied and emphasized experience, memory and knowledge as its main components (Howes and Classen 2014; Ingold 2000; Marks 2000:146). The senses have gained special attention in the anthropological study of perception, with academics placing emphasis on studying *through* the senses, rather than about (Ingold 2011; Omrani 2014, Pink 2009). Only then intellectual abstractions can be overcome and the everyday life of lived experiences can be studied (Howes and Classen 2014:7).

What appears to be a consensus in approaching the study of perception is

overshadowed by a debate between Howes, Pink and Ingold on which direction such study should be headed. While Howes (2014) emphasizes the relevance of cultural patterns and sensory order of perception, Tim Ingold (2000; 2011:314) focuses on the individual situatedness of every living being on a particular nexus of growth and development within a field of relations, in which skills of perception and action emerge. Countering Howes' statement that it would be inadequate to rely solely on personal experience for understanding how people perceive the world because perception results from social conditioning (Howes 2014:9), Ingold argues that we should focus on the practicalities of sensing the world (2011:317).). Differences in the way this is being done and how the world is perceived stem from inhabiting the same existential grounding in the world. Depending on their position in an environment of relations, people perceive in different ways. Drawing this process back to a cultural relativistic approach as employed by Howes would therefore be wrong, Ingold states (ibid.), because the specificity of perception is denied.

Laura Marks appears to be exploring the middle ground of this debate, which I have adopted within my research. In pointing out the importance of memory for perceiving, Marks (2000:147) argues that perception relies on both individual and cultural memories that are being evoked by sensorial clues within the environment. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Marks (2000:148) continues by emphasizing that memory emerges from the progressive and continuous passing of one experience of such clues into another. And these evoked recollections, Grossman (2010:170) notes, consist of 'overlapping temporalities, spaces and narratives that echo the fragmentary, rhythmic, multi-layered experiences of recollection itself'. These insights lead back to Ingold (2000:11) who signifies experience as the source of knowledge, informing perceptions that in turn inform the self. It is here that the main components of perception meet and reinforce each other in an ongoing cycle of sensorial engagement within the environment.

By means of sensing, experiencing and negotiating perception, our being in the world is established (Grossman 2010; Ingold 2000, 2011; Ochs and Capps 1996). In this active engagement with the environment looking is akin to listening just as smelling is akin to looking, whereas the totality of senses work together in the organic whole of the self and the environment (Ingold 2011:314). Highlighting one of the senses for ethnographic exploration does not place it on top of a hierarchy, since there is no systematic ordering of the senses to begin with. Hence, whether perception is

communicated through narratives (Ochs and Capps 1996), bodily responses and enactments (Ingold 2013), or incorporated within the practices of everyday life, it becomes a site on which being in the world is constituted. The sensorial dimensions of perception allow experience and memory to unfold into embodied knowledge through which the language of the environment is read. Choosing what to read (and thus see, smell, hear, taste, feel) stems from the connection between the mind and land, the self and the environment (Ingold 2010). Consequently, perception demands its place within the reality of a world of appearances that assigns meaning to the environment.

A local approach on perception and the senses: How do inhabitants of Millingen perceive their environment and the changes within it?

The engagement between inhabitants of Millingen and their environment will be explored starting with the premise that the journey in landscape is in constant connection with the journey in mind through sensory engagement (Ingold 2010:18). Exploring the way the environment and changes within it are being perceived through an emphasis on vision 'allows us to flatter ourselves that we constitute the world' (Marks 2000:148). This makes it a promising sensory focus for studying the ways in which inhabitants of Millingen engage, constitute and perpetuate their environment. Following both Marks (2000) and Ingold (2010) I will explore local ways of perceiving by tracing its roots back to the remembered socio-historical foundations upon which inhabitants of Millingen connect with the river. Embedding this approach locally enables me to unravel embodied knowledge and the ways in which inhabitants appeal to this when attributing importance to elements within the environment and the changes it faced. It underpins the multiple perspectives that exist, intertwine and possibly overlap, and diminishes any illusion that policies affect inhabitants within the environment in an invariable way.

ENVIRONMENT

Drawing from the concepts above, the environment unfolds itself in culturally, socially and historically informed constructions that are maintained by sensory ways of perceiving and attributing meaning to the world around us (Ingold 2000; Marks 2000). However, environment as a concept employed in analytical frameworks has been treated with great variety, structured along its natural and social resources that

define its meaning (Bender 2002; Crate 2011; Muhlhausler and Peace 2006; Thin 2002). Arguing that the environment should be both subject and object of anthropological inquiry, Thin (2002) emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach. One way anthropological studies of environment have answered to the need for holism is by studying the utilization of the environment in an everyday setting (Mulhausler and Peace 2006). But far more than being studied as a resource necessary as a means of supporting livelihood, environment has been studied on affective, cultural and relational levels that create a landscape that people inhabit as well (Harris 1993). MacDougall (2006:96) underpins this in what he calls the social landscape, by emphasizing people their dependence on culturally patterned, sensory experiences in which structures of the landscape are read, processed and acted upon. Similar to Ferguson's analysis (1999), oppositions between nature and culture are blurred and the focus is redirected towards the place in which nature and culture, and body and mind, collide.

Placing relations of reciprocity at the core of the study on environment adds another layer of meaning to its role in the everyday lives of inhabitants within their environment (Croll and Parkin 1992:3). The environment is not just a set of things to which people adapt, but rather a set of ongoing relations of mutual adaption between culture and the context of the environment, which is always culturally and personally perceived (Thin 2002). A crucial anthropological exploration of this layer of meaning is made by Ingold that focuses on a personal engagement with environment **(**2000; 2013). In his contribution to the debate one does not only read the environment, but also tastes, smells, hears and feels it in an ongoing relationship within the self. In *the Perception of the Environment* Ingold (2000) moves away from the Cartesian dualism that sets the self as an autonomous whole off against an external environment. Instead, Ingold works towards an understanding where perceiving, experiencing and being in the world result from a creative unfolding of relations, within which beings emerge, take on particular forms, and position themselves within the environment (ibid.:19). The environment is best seen as the world as it exists and takes on meaning to oneself. Consequently, the self and the environment experience the same developments, always existing within each other. The unfolding of relations is therefore fundamentally historical and reciprocal, allowing meaningful connections to develop within one organic whole.

Retracing the steps within this reciprocal process means an active and ongoing

engagement with the environment that Ingold describes as the '*ecology of recovering the reality of the life process*' (2000:16). It builds on a creative approach of perceiving by which the everyday life comes to exist. In order to explore this life process and find answers to how the environment becomes meaningful, I have engaged myself with creative modes of construction that reside within audiovisual methods of data gathering and reporting.

A local approach on environment: How is the meaning of environment constructed and maintained by inhabitants of Millingen?

In studying the environment of Millingen, my approach builds on the work of Ingold (2000) and encompasses the holistic approach to environmental anthropology as outlined above. By acknowledging the creativity in which people construct and maintain their everyday life within the environment I aim to generate space where insights can be developed on how the environment is locally defined. This enables me to describe how the environment of Millingen is perceived and how perception mediates policy-inflicted changes that people are confronted with. I aim to study a site in which national and local interpretations of environment are coexistent, embedding the self in a wider context of unfolding and enfolding relations. This is important because it recognizes different and constantly changing interpretations and discourses that underpin the environment and the way its landscape is being read (Mulhausler and Peace 2006). Acknowledging the interconnectedness of political, cultural, social and personal involvement within the environment opens up new realms in which environment gains meaning. By studying this on a personal level, inescapably intertwined with other levels of interpretation, I explored how the environment gains meaning in relation to the self among inhabitants of Millingen.

National interpretations on water-security: Water management policies in the Netherlands

Figure 1: Dutch river area (http://www.revaboriv.nl/write/Afbeeldingen1/kaart1_Topografie_plangebied_19-12-05v2.jpg)

Figure 2: Flow of the river Rhine that originates in Switzerland and continues through Germany and the Netherlands (http://geolution.nl/atlas/rivieren/rhine.gif)

Control and believe in malleability of the environment are considered as flagships of Dutch water management policies (Doevendans et al. 2007). These policies continue to generate new developments while adding multiple meanings and definitions to the landscape in this process (ibid.: 338) in an attempt to prevent the country from flooding. The necessity of water management in the Netherlands is perceived as essential, with a large part of its territory located below sea level (Rijkswaterstaat 2011). Water defenses in the shape of dunes, dams, dikes and the Delta Project enabled to create a safe environment to live in (ibid.:39). But as this system developed, another risk was created by an increasing amount of river water that became forced to remain in a limited space between high winter-dikes, causing the water to rise extensively in the event of high discharge rates. A mutually reinforcing, ongoing cycle of water management was enkindled, putting the Netherlands on the map as 'controllers of the sea' (ibid.)

The Delta Project has in particular been a significant element in underpinning this Dutch reputation. The project was created as a response to a raising awareness on the effects of climate change and a disaster that hit the southwest Netherlands in 1953 where water defenses failed (Rijkswaterstaat 2011:16) during a storm in combination with high tide. It caused a part of the country to flood, leaving a memory of disastrous consequences to resonate in people their minds. The cornerstones behind the Delta Project are since directed at keeping the Netherlands sufficiently safe, habitable and attractive (Rijkswaterstaat 2013). In the meantime investments were made in areas behind the dikes and the number of people living there increased significantly (Rijkswaterstaat 2011:39). Combined with the overall economical value of the river-area, Rijkswaterstaat notes that the consequences of a dike burst would be disastrous (ibid.:37). By adding new water defense systems and strengthening already existing ones, such as dikes, the Delta Project continued to work on enhancing water security (i.e. prevent flooding) in the Netherlands. Yet, the country was confronted with the possibility of another near-disaster in the winter of 1995.

By the end of January 1995 the water levels in the rivers Rhine, Waal and Maas had increased to such a critical extent - due to extreme rainfall and melting snow in Germany and Switzerland - that the decision was taken to evacuate nearly 250.000 people from the Dutch river-area. (Interestingly enough no evacuation measurements were taken in the bordering German river-area, that faced the exact same 'threat'). While no dike bursts occurred, in the end, awareness about the risks of

the river and the perceived necessity of water management in the Netherlands increased again. This resulted in new Dutch policies that rooted in a risk-based approach that brought the consequences of actual flooding into focus (Rijkswaterstaat 2011:39). Stating that 'a large-scale flooding will cause widespread damage and long-term disruption of our society', Rijkswaterstaat (ibid.) is reluctant to elaborate on what this disruption of society entails, except for the economical damage it could cause. Consequently the question becomes what safety is within the Dutch water management policies. In an answer to this, Rijkswaterstaat states:

> "Dikes and dunes ensure that we may *feel* safe. All the dunes and the most important dikes are called primary water defenses, because they protect us from flooding (..). The secondary defenses are also important, but if a dike in this category collapses, the consequences are not as dramatic – although the inhabitants of Wilnis (*A Dutch village)* may think differently.(..) in terms of safety, Wilnis is of a different concern (..). If the primary water defenses were breached, the consequences would be considerably greater[1]" (Rijkswaterstaat 2011:38).

Safety standards are set out for every dike ring area, and according to the economic activities that take place within this area and the number of inhabitants residing there, the standard is set higher or lower. Next, the standard is expressed in a probability that a critical water level will occur, and in the current policy this is set once every 1250 years.

In order to control these standards of safety that were introduced after the evacuation of 1995, the program *Space for the River*[2] manifested itself in the Dutch river-area. This program argues that providing more space to rivers enhances water security in the Netherlands. Countering previous interventions of water management that characterize the Netherlands, such as heightening dikes, the Space for the River program works on managing riverbeds through excavations, relocating dikes, lowering summer-dikes[3] and allowing a river to expand its flow when more water needs to be discharged (Rijkswaterstaat 2013). Space that was given to people to inhabit is then being retracted without involving the inhabitants in the political dialogue.

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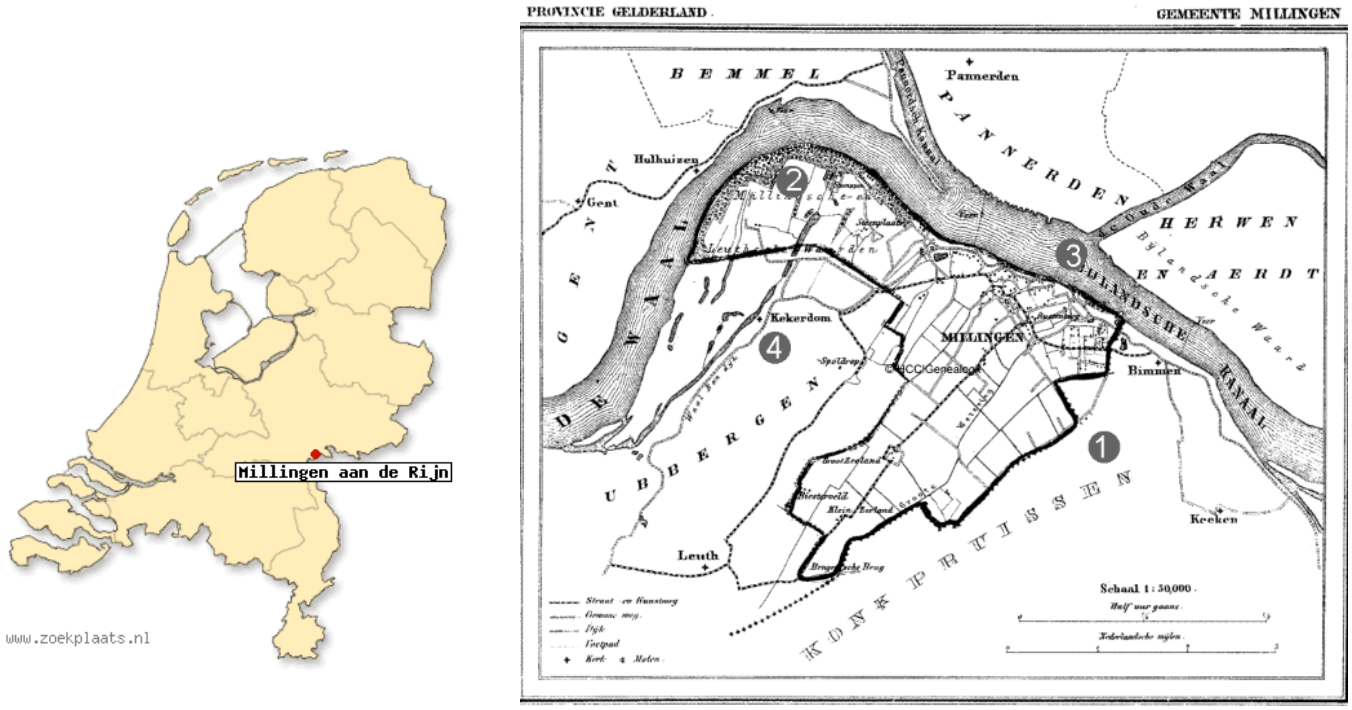
[1] Italics by me.

[2] Dutch: Ruimte voor de rivier

[3] Summer dikes are dikes placed outside of the higher winter dikes that are the main water defense protecting areas behind the dikes from flooding.

Thus, instead of embracing the interwoven structure of politics, discourses and interpretations outlined by Ferguson (1999), the latest Dutch water management policy appears to hold on to a linear approach of establishing security. The challenge will be to overcome this in order to perpetuate an anthropological understanding of how policy is perceived and functions in the locally lived reality of Dutch inhabitants. The long history of Dutch water management policies has to be acknowledged, though, for its ways by which local realities and knowledge about water security have been informed.

From the ground up: geographical and social environment



figures 3, 4. Left: position of Millingen in the Netherlands (www.zoekplaats.nl) and Right: Map of Millingen aan de Rijn.(www.plaatsengids.nl)

The Dutch village Millingen aan de Rijn provides home to 5883 inhabitants residing behind a three-kilometer long river-dike, with the exception of four households located outside the dike in a district called Klaverland. Millingen is geographically bordered by Germany (figure 4:1), the nature reserve called 'the Millingerwaard' – of which Klaverland is part (figure 4:2), the Ooijpolder (figure 4:4) and the river Rhine (figure 4:3). One main road connects the village to its neighboring village Kekerdom

(figure 4:4), which up until the eighteenth century was part of German territories (Van Eck 2005). The Dutch-German border was patrolled which hindered inhabitants of this area to freely move from one side of the border to the other. As a result Millingen became characterized as an isolated village that, I have been told, even after the inclusion of Kekerdom into Dutch territories and the opening of the Dutch-German border, continues to be nicknamed as 'the appendix of the Netherlands'.

The experienced isolation appears to have resulted in a high involvement in unions, associations and events that were located within the village (Hell 1996). Associations were manifold after the local militia split up into two unions that continued under the name of 'Dröge' and 'Natte'[4]. This development implemented artificial boundaries within Millingen that caused a history of categorizations to slowly unfold itself. There were two soccer-teams, two orchestras and even specific stores and cafes people would go to, based on their association with either the Dröge or Natte. Social mobility across these associations was not done, I was told.

Interestingly, there was one element in the environment of Millingen that connected its inhabitants, namely the presence of the river. From the nineteenth century onward, the river interweaved itself with work and life in the village. Brickyards were able to prosper due to the clay the river provided, and the realization of a shipyard by Bodewes in 1837 enhanced the possibilities within Millingen to establish a livelihood (Eilander 1971). Not only did the shipyard provide work to the then 3468 inhabitants of Millingen[5] (at its golden days over 500 employees), it also created more housing possibilities in the village. Ferries were introduced that brought people from one side of the river to the other, cafes were built on the dike where people met; life with the river flourished.

The river became defined as a source of livelihood and connected Millingen, despite its isolation, with other parts of the Netherlands and even Europe. People from 'all over the world', I was told, visited Millingen and its shipyard, if only for a few days. As outsiders connected with locals, they enriched the experience of living in the village. The dike that separated the village from the river formed a meeting-point where people from the different associations could also meet and mix. Consequently,

[4] This translates as those who are "dry" and those who are "wet". The acclaimed origin of these names are attributed to the river but also to a way of being, where the Dröge were less economically free and inclined to give, whereas people associated with the Natte had more money to spend.

[5] Numbers based on year 1950 http://www.dbnl.org/arch/_bev001bevo22_01/pag/_bevo001bevo22_01.pdf

boundaries within the village moved to the background so that the only distinction that was left was placed between 'people from land' and 'people from water' (Hell 1996). Technological and social developments continued to blur these boundaries even further– but did not erase them- and enkindled a culture of change shaped by the presence of the river.

Changing tides and times: dealing with insecurities

When I started my fieldwork by December 2013 the role of the river seemed to have changed significantly since. I did not encounter an animated life along the riverside or on the dike where people engaged themselves with the river. While my research participants rightfully pointed out that the cold winter days did not provide the warmest invitation to 'go outside' and engage with the environment, there seemed to be more going on than just that. The landscape appeared to be under construction. Branches of trees were cut off, trees were marked with orange and pink graffiti, excavators were working their way through the riverbeds and only bewildered remains of what used to be a brickyard could be spotted. And on December 24 the news hit that the shipyard, that now only provided work for a little over thirty people, would close its doors by the 1st of January 2014. As the sound of the hammers hitting metal surfaces gradually faded, a previously familiar structure of landscape opened up to me and became a site for new readings and perceptions to develop.

It turned out that what I was experiencing was the result of a long trajectory of changes manifested in the environment by a set of policies that tried to cope with insecurities imposed by the river its proximity to the village. Moving along the historical pathways of change, about which I was informed by my research participants as well as by available documentation on policies, it became clear to me that the dike functioned as a token of security, history, and loss in a continuous process of change.

Separating water from land, dikes made living close to the river possible. They were modified to enhance security, but in order for this to be realized, some people's houses and cafes located on the dike had to be demolished. In the ongoing search for safety, the dike in Millingen continued to be strengthened and heightened multiple times. Social, technological and environmental developments simultaneously decreased the river its value of a source of income and people were eventually forced to commute further in order to find work. In doing so, focus was placed on land

instead of water. While a small group of inhabitants continued to work at the shipyard, ferry or boats supplying goods on the water, I was told that most inhabitants of Millingen needed to adapt their everyday lives and the way they secured a livelihood to the changed role of the river. They did so by searching for work in the city of Nijmegen and its neighboring villages or within the German city Kleve once the borders between Germany and the Netherlands were opened up in the 1980s.

Forced to move

In the midst of these socio-economic changes taking place, the Rhine rose to critical levels in the winter of 1995. This worried the national government to such an extent that they demanded 250.000 inhabitants of the Dutch river-area to evacuate, out of fear for possible dike bursts.

The Dutch government appealed to local municipalities to realize the stressed need for evacuation, and different municipalities responded in different ways, based on their location, pre-existing evacuation-plans and other available resources[6]. In the short time-span of one day people were asked to leave their houses and find shelter elsewhere outside the Dutch river area. The municipality of Millingen applied a local policy that emphasized the importance of social security and a feeling of safety. Therefore, all evacuees needed to register where they were going to and the village was hermetically closed with the help of Dutch military to prevent houses from being looted[7].

The process of evacuating put people their flexibility to cope with change to the test. While some people removed all the furniture out of their house and sought shelter in hotels or by family and friends, others only took some clothing, important documents such as passports and insurance papers, and photo-albums with them. Others had never left Millingen before, and with all their family members living in Millingen as well, they were forced to evacuate by busses that took them to hotels

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[6] I have visited inhabitants of different municipalities: Millingen aan de Rijn, Beek-Ubbergen and Beneden-Leeuwen, where I encountered different ways in which the policies during evacuation were being remembered. Research participants of Beneden-Leeuwen and Beek-Ubbergen expressed a felt lack of communication and organization in *how* and *where* to evacuate, resulting in an experienced feeling of distress. Research participants in Millingen emphasized the well-organized ways in which the village was evacuated, despite the turbulent times they were in.

[7] This policy was maintained by former mayor Thea de Roos-van Rooden, who decided to stay in the village together with local firefighters and the military delegation. Thea stated in an interview the importance she dedicated to the emotional well-being of the inhabitants that she tried to uphold during the evacuation.

nearby where it was safe. Mimi Seegers experienced the effects of this event first handedly when she helped evacuating the retirement home and saw the impact it had emotionally and physically on the elderly, of which some related it to their traumatic evacuation during the Second World War. According to Mimi, this move away from home awakened a reflexive way of being, in which the meaning of 'home' was evaluated and (re)defined. Having to leave your belongings, she stated, made you aware of what you have and what really matters.

While moving out of their homes, inhabitants were confronted with media reports of the situation that allowed them to watch their home from a distant, different, perspective that conflicted and collided with the personal way of looking at their environment. The presence of the river had not yet been perceived by inhabitants in the way the media portrayed it, as Harry Sanders emphasized. While people were away from home for a still unknown period of time, they suddenly had to rely on a set of new eyes that interpreted the environment and created an inner dialogue between 'what *they* said and what *we* know'. Noting the personal unrest this evoked, the mayor of Millingen responded to the situation by trying to keep in touch with 'her inhabitants', as she described them to me. She personally visited the hotels in which locals were staying and provided them with as much information as possible about the situation in Millingen. It was her aim to contribute to a feeling of safety wherever this was possible.

Re-constructing home and safety

Returning home after a week where 'nothing happened', was the best thing about leaving, I was told. Many people made use of the opportunity to repaint and remodel their houses, since they had removed their furniture anyway. In the week they were evacuated, inhabitants reflected on the things they could have done differently – for instance what they should have taken with them and what not – and treated these insights as lessons for the future. The evacuation added a new experience to a long time engagement with the environment, embodied in the life history of the inhabitants. 'What such an event tells you', a visitor of *het Leugenbankje* mentioned, 'is that you have to prepare yourself to be flexible'. When policy-makers say that the threat of rising water may occur once every 1000 or 2000 years, this still means it may happen tomorrow. You have to be prepared for that.

Elaborating on ways to be prepared, inhabitants defined mechanisms of safety they could rely on. First, there were the insurance companies that could cover any significant losses in case of a flooding. Second, family and friends would be willing to help wherever possible, as they did in 1995. Moreover, the locally executed policy that dealt with the evacuation proved to be good. Only the important material possessions and documents should be kept in the attic – that would never flood. Some research participants noted that they bought a boat, just in case. I was being assured that if even the boat would fail, they knew to locate the highest points in the village where they would be safe. In approaching safety inhabitants appeared to rely on self-defined ways to be mobile and independent. This created systems of trust that provided inhabitants with freedom to appropriate the way they sense the risk of flooding and that allows them to continue perceiving the beauty that life in Millingen provides as part of their home.

As change continues

After safely returning home one week after being evacuated, the inhabitants of Millingen were about to encounter a long list of nationally constituted policies that would affect their environment as a response to the threat that caused the evacuation. One of these Dutch water management policies (Rijkswaterstaat 2011, 2013) assigned Millingen, together with the Ooijpolder, as a possible overflow area that would be flooded on purpose in case of an emergency caused by too much water pressure on dikes (Luteijn 2002). This evoked several local protests, led by the *Hoogwater Platform*[8], which emphasized the disastrous local consequences such policies would inflict to the area. Harry Sanders, head of the board of the Hoogwater Platform, told me how local and academic expertise was used to reanalyze the measurements upon which the proposed national policies were based, and how he invited politicians to the area to

Figure 5 Information sign on reconstruction Millingerwaard: 'for safety and nature'.

[8] A local initiated platform dealing with policies on the management of high water levels in Millingen and the Ooijpolder that fights against a policy-implemented flooding of the area.

provide them with a glimpse of the negative consequences *their* policies would bring forth.

While no definite decisions were being made at the time, the focus shifted towards more structural measurements that could be taken against future risks of flooding (Rijkswaterstaat 2011). This proposed the idea to designate Millingen as a possible retention area that could be intentionally flooded as an instrument of prevention and not out of direct emergency. Parallel to this news, the policy program *Space for the River* (Rijkswaterstaat 2013) started to manifest itself in the environment of Millingen by restructuring its riverbeds, of which the largest share takes place in the nature reserve Millingerwaard, that had gradually taken shape over the course of the last fifty years when clay was won from the area. As a result of this policy, summer-dikes have been lowered, trees have been removed from the riverbeds and excavators dig out the nature reserve to create streams in which the river can spill over when its water level rises. In the scarce information that is provided to the inhabitants of Millingen, this policy is portrayed as change in which safety and nature go hand in hand (see figure 5), 'protecting nature, enabling more tourism and recreation, and preparing the environment for future climate change' (Ruimte voor de Rivier 2010). However, what the inhabitants of Millingen are exposed to appears to be an ongoing reconstruction in what used to be a familiar part of their environment[9].

With the threat of a possible designation as retention area still vaguely reverberating in the back of inhabitants their minds, the changes that are taking place seem contradictory and redundant to them. Dikes that were once heightened are now being lowered, and the 'so-called care for ecology and nature translates itself into excavators crushing all the nature and wildlife on its way'[10], according to Niels van Hoorn who lives in Klaverland. In the meantime, tourism fills the gaps that were left after the economical – and thereby social - value of the river started to decline. Yet, tourism provides significantly less economical welfare for the village itself, my research participants note, because there is nothing *within* the village that attracts tourists. It is the river and the nature surrounding it that attracts, which makes tourists into passers-by. The municipality underpins this by noting that 'the village has no

[9] Most research participants referred to the Millingerwaard as something 'out there' that nowadays attracts mostly tourists 'who did not know any better' (i.e. know anything about the history of the environment).
[10] My translation

socio-economical core that attracts tourists and enhances economical activities' (Gemeente Millingen 2007:7). Consequently, tourists are only to be found on the remaining ferry of the village, at a tourist information centre located on the dike, and in a café located in the Millingerwaard.

I was told that the most significant impact of the policy-implemented changes in Millingen was that the water level of the river has become less predictable, now that the environment was being restructured and rainwater gets directly drained into the river. This development was set off against knowledge of the past, where the water level of the river would rise twice a year, during fall and spring, as a direct result of rain and snow that fell along the riverside in Germany or melted in the Swiss Alps. Because of the implemented policies to reduce the flood risk, nowadays water levels can be so low that this creates new problems, of which the closing of the shipyard serves as an example. Due to the low water levels, the shipyard could not function for twenty-two weeks in the past year, as its ramp does not longer suffice to reach ships and let them enter the shipyard. Investments that were required to adjust the shipyard to the lower water levels were considered financially unfeasible by the company and eventually contributed to the shipyard shutting down.

In the conversations I had, inhabitants expressed considerable doubt when talking about the current policy-inflicted changes taking place in their environment and appeared distrustful of their effectiveness. The inhabitants did not experience any dike burst in 1995, nor an immediate threat of high water levels after that moment in time. What they did experience, however, was a changing environment and a decline of the river its social and economical value. Millingen changed in ways that affected all inhabitants. Millingen now only holds home to fifty-eight businesses with a total of 227 employees (Gemeente Millingen 2007)[11], and the necessity for the nearly 6000 inhabitants of Millingen to move in and out of the village on a daily basis as a means of securing and maintaining livelihoods increased. The village only offers one elementary school and the nearest high school is located eighteen kilometers away. Traces of the village its rich history in unions and associations are still to be found but do not centre along the river. As a result, mobility becomes incorporated in the everyday life of Millingen, starting at a young age.

[11] These data are from before the shipyard closed its doors in January 2014.

Nevertheless, my research participants stressed their understanding of the necessity of the general Dutch water management policy. Bart Schmitjes, former head of the shipyard and longtime inhabitant of Millingen, accurately remarked that 'developments don't cease to exist and the need to keep dry feet is widely understood'[12]. Most importantly, work on reducing flood risk does not overshadow the continuation of everyday life in Millingen. However, the local reality in Millingen has dealt with more losses than the current reports on Dutch water management policy account for, Bart acclaims, which results in many social and economical effects to be left out of scope. It prevents the locally perceived reality from being fully acknowledged in expert interpretations.

Expanding environment

The ongoing cycle of change and appropriation developed a keen awareness among inhabitants of how the river and the people living near it are subject to change. Whether changes are caused by environmental or political forces, inhabitants of Millingen have to deal with instability as part of their everyday lives. They respond to it by being flexible; able and willing to move whenever needed as long as returning home remains an option.

Now that the economical and social contributions of the river have changed, environment, livelihood and home are no longer captured in one place. In adjusting to the changing circumstances locals expand their environment, adding new experiences and new places to their everyday life. As was noted before, being on the move develops ways of reflecting on the 'life process', to borrow Ingold's term, in Millingen aan de Rijn. My research participants told me that the move away from home, whether for work or for the more unlikely event of an evacuation, revealed what used to go unnoticed within the familiar structures of everyday life. When we talked about their life in Millingen, particular emphasis was placed on going home. 'A sense of calmness hits you when you enter the polder after returning from work. That is when you know you are home'[13], Elly explained. You learn to deal with changes after having experienced the evacuation, I was told, because now you know what to do. Elly emphasized that after being exposed to the good and the bad, you

[12] My translation
[13] My translation

choose what is most important to you, and you continue to perceive your environment, your home, like that. 'Once you've lived here all your life, it's what you know. And now that it has become relatively easy to travel to other villages or cities, you can create ways of earning money while you continue to live in Millingen. It's not as isolated as it used to be, although that single dike connecting us to other places can be a bit of a dread'[14], Elly explained.

Through their way of placing themselves within the environment, inhabitants showed that their key to safety is to move along with change in a consciously made personal decision. Local notions about safety appear to be far more complex than national policies account for, and thus inhabitants turn to their own experiences in order to find a feeling of safety. After almost twenty years of using social coping mechanisms that rely on trust, mobility and social and personal knowledge, inhabitants of Millingen seem to have established a local way of guaranteeing the sustainability of home as a safe haven in times of change.

[14] My translation

APPROPRIATING THE ENVIRONMENT

The coping mechanisms inhabitants developed did not designate flood risk as a dark cloud lingering on the horizon. Worrying about things that *might* happen did not contribute to the feeling of safety inhabitants tried to maintain, hence the environment of Millingen was subjected to 'a second reading', as Hirsch (1995) noted, in which inhabitants focused on positively perceived elements within it. By using familiar elements within the environment my research participants elaborated on their ways of being in Millingen, and accordingly, their being in the world. The river proved to be the key element within it, as an element that - despite all the changes that occurred - always remained a nearby dominating factor.

I encountered three ways in which elements in the environment were read, and perceived accordingly. First, inhabitants drew on structures of the past to relate to the environment as it is today. The polders, the river, and the dike proved to be persistent structures that carry many personal and social memories into the present. Second, inhabitants pointed out elements in the environment such as ships on the river, or sounds on the shipyard, as signifiers of being home. And third, the high variation of wildlife surrounding the river and the village provided them with elements that were being addressed as meaningful and characteristic for life in Millingen. Together, these ways attribute importance to the river within the wider environment so that it remains a defining part of inhabitants their lives even when times have changed.

Structures of the past

When I spoke to former mayor Thea de Roos- van Rooden, she mentioned how she was struck by the importance of the past for inhabitants of Millingen. One of the first things inhabitants asked her, when she started working in the village in 1990, was if it was possible to restore the dike the way it used to be, because 'the old days were so wonderful'[15]. Erik Janssen underpinned this and stressed how the landscape of Millingen signified home because it was so familiar. Besides a long personal engagement with the environment of the village and many family-members and friends living there, it is the river in particular that attracts and characterizes the village, he said. My research participants showed, by exploring the ways the

[15] My translation. The old days referred to times before the dike strengthening of 1978 for which cafes and houses that were located on the dike had to be demolished.

environment is structured, that the environment is almost like a map of life that inhabitants incorporate. This map was imbued with elements that evoked memories of the past. For many research participants the river and its riverbeds could best be seen as a giant playground, full of games, excitement and adventure. Chasing mice that were fleeing the rising water in the polder, ice-skating on flooded riverbeds, building tree-houses in the Millingerwaard, or swimming in between the river groins despite the fact your parents told you not to; all this and more signified life with the river as a youngster. And as far as I could observe, these signifiers continue to be important among next generations. Moving into more philosophical grounds, many research participants reflected on the dynamic nature of the river and how it became somewhat symbolic of life processes. Marga for instance, told me how the river, to her, symbolized a way of dealing with struggles in life: how water always finds a way around obstacles in its trajectory. Margret, who moved to Millingen to be with the love of her life, told me about seeing the river as a way of balancing a somewhat hectic life; being near the river would take worries away. And many research participants noted how the continuous flow of the river never ceases to amaze, inspire and attract them. 'The river continues to entertain you', so I was told.

Added to that there are still structures of the past that linger in the present. Remains of brickyards can still be witnessed in the Millingerwaard, for instance, and the shipyard and some remaining structures of an old harbor can be seen in the landscape. And even when structures such as previous cafes on the dike are not to be seen anymore, they are still being perceived in the memories of life on the dike, as I will show in the next chapter. Old structures of the environment hence are particularly meaningful for those who have experienced them before, when they were still functioning as parts of the everyday life in Millingen.

Experiences of home

When I walked along the dike and engaged in casual conversations with people, I was almost directly drawn into their personally defined benefits of living in Millingen. These benefits related to a feeling of home. For Marga, who moved to Millingen twenty years ago, it were the sounds of the shipyard that reminded her of her hometown, Amsterdam. I met an elderly man standing on the dike, looking at ships passing by. He used to be a sailor and eventually set foot on land in Millingen, where he decided to stay. The shipyard provided work for him. 'There's not much music in

the village itself for me', he stressed, 'but the river carries all that I'm used to know that's why I'm here'[16]. It was not much later when a young woman with her two-year old daughter on the back of her bicycle stopped me to ask for directions. She had just moved to the village and wanted to know if the dike would continue its way along the riverside. She explained that while she herself grew up on a boat, her daughter did not. It was important for her that her daughter could experience sounds and sights of boats herself too, which was her motivation to move to Millingen. Similar sentiments resonated among the inhabitants I interviewed in their homes, indicating that life with the river was closely associated with 'home'.

Water attracts

In the light of the newest economic contribution of the river, tourism, Millingen is promoted by its municipality as *the* village where the Rhine and natural wealth prosper. The environment its splendor is widely recognized among inhabitants and tourists from all over the country: the area is able to provide tranquility, a high variation of wildlife and recreation. Even when the water levels rise, research participants noted, the landscape was beautiful, exciting and adventurous. You would see more animals, you could hear birds more clearly and you literally heard the environment change, Jan Hubbers explained. The added value of this was especially – but not solely- emphasized among people living in Klaverland, the small community located outside the dike. Despite living in that part of the area that would be the first to flood, they refused to perceive water as threatening. I was shown a home-video that dated back to 1995 when houses in Klaverland flooded. It showed how the community gathered in the one house that the water didn't reach. They experienced, what appeared to be a fun evening full of food, drinks and laughs. They vigorously pointed out at the time that they did not want to evacuate but were eventually being forced to leave. Living with water and its risks is by this community being embraced as part of their lives. The times the water would be a possible threat did not weigh up to the splendor it added to their environment; these people sought after natural adventure. For them Klaverland provides them precisely with the unique quality of variation in tides and seasons.

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[16] My translation

Attributing importance to elements

Being in the world by engaging with the environment in the above ways, created a kind of proof to inhabitants that the river had not imposed any *real* threat in Millingen since 1995. I noticed that many inhabitants felt the need to share stories with fellow-inhabitants about what they had seen, heard, or experienced in another way, as they seemed to search for confirmation about the current situation of the environment. Remarks such as 'The water levels have decreased again, you see?' 'Yes, I do. Who would've thought?' were frequently uttered when people strolled along the dike. 'By engaging with the environment you feel at home', Erik stated, 'while you keep track of what is happening on water and land and share this with others. Millingen is small, so it's easy to find each other when needed. It provides you with a feeling of trust because others experience and know (the history of) the environment too'[17].

I myself experienced such a connection among inhabitants in *het Leugenbankje*, a small brick building that replaced a former boathouse located on the dike. With some effort about seven people would regularly gather in this minute construction of three brick walls, a roof and a small bench inside of it. Mostly elderly locals gathered here, where they talked about the news of Millingen and where they shared stories about the past. These stories were built on recollections of personal experiences with people that lived in the village, life on the dike, maritime transportation and the shipyard. They evaluated the current situation and shared their opinions about it. Every ship, car, or inhabitant that passed by - which could be seen when sitting in *het Leugenbankje* - would evoke a story. It was striking to experience how in these stories, the small-scale environment of the village was constantly addressed. Because the visitors of *het Leugenbankje* all grew up in Millingen they could relate to each other's stories. Moreover, they could confirm the stories when outsiders, such as policy makers or media reports, did not. Their mutual knowledge about 'people of Millingen' and 'how

Figure 6. Social gathering at het Leugenbankje

[17] My translation

they knew life in Millingen as it used to be' allowed them to connect and feel safe, so I was told.

Appropriating by engaging

With the appeal of the river defined as a common denominator in explaining why my research participants chose to anchor themselves in Millingen, the research gradually fleshed out ways in which inhabitants connected to the river. The primary source of connecting existed through frequently engaging within the environment by walking, talking or just *being* in it.

With less work centered around the river it was harder to tell who would be on the dike or not. Apart from the regulars that tend to meet at *het Leugenbankje*, social engagement along the riverside seemed scattered, making gatherings less likely. Individuals moved along the dike in their own pace and time, only occasionally pausing for a brief chat. Engaging themselves with other villages and cities, more experiences and places became important to inhabitants of Millingen, so that visiting the dike for a stroll, for example, relied on a personal desire to do so, Bart Schmitjes emphasized. This desire to visit the riverside, often described as 'need', appeared to be perceived as an essential feature of living in Millingen. Elly explained how she drove her car along the dike everyday before going to work, even if this meant taking a detour, because she 'had to see the river'. Rene Rieken did the same, and added that he still checked the newspaper on a daily basis for information on current water levels. Consequently locals did find their way to each other, despite their current social lives being more dispersed among different places outside of Millingen as well.

When negotiating interpretations of the environment of Millingen with my research participants it struck me how in doing so the past is being remembered, the present is lived and the unpredictability of the future is made manageable by emphasizing the qualities of the here and now. This process of appropriation appealed to elements within the environment, and created common grounds that enabled inhabitants to continue experienced realities of the past by bringing it into the social present. Within this, the river proves to be a persistent feature that characterizes Millingen and life as it is lived by its inhabitants. The dike with its view over the river water continues to attract all.

EMBODYING PERCEPTION

Structures within the environment provide sensory clues to memory and experience in the everyday life of Millingen, upon which perceptions are developed and shared. These structures do not however resonate solely in the social life of the village, but claim their place in the personal realms of embodied knowledge as well. Here, the experiences that are gained by being in the environment of Millingen appear to translate into a reality that is situated in the self and that informs the way people look and act within their environment. Just like the experience of the evacuation translated into coping mechanisms to deal with any instabilities imposed by change, so is experience of the positively evaluated elements within the environment translated in a sensorial and affective relation with the environment. But how does this process of translation work? Which sensory pathways are being addressed? And how individual is perception when it is embodied? My research participants provided insights into these questions by emphasizing two pathways to perception: ways of looking and ways of listening.

Ways of looking

As the water flows, its fluctuating water levels cover and reveal structures within the landscape. Karel Plass reckoned that every water level evokes a new way of looking; with every inch of water added or removed you see things differently. In this ongoing process you learn to look, he said, because you remember how the environment has been and compare that with how it is now. Moreover, being able to look at the dynamics of the river and the way life is able to unfold upon and next to it enriches the environment. By looking at the river, as *the* element that continues to characterize the village, inhabitants felt they could diminish the impact of the changes that took place. As a result of this Millingen continues to be the village they know.

Choosing not to look was a decision made in the same realm as described above, and often related to policy-inflicted changes that didn't correspond with previous experiences. When addressing how they perceive the reconstruction of the *Millingerwaard*, for example, research participants told me they did not feel the desire to go there since the interventions that took place removed the area into unknown territories. Johan Lemmens recalled that 'first, the Millingerwaard consisted of community-owned meadows where you had a cow or two. You would come there and

play. Then they (policy-makers) decided that it should become a nature reserve, after which they placed fences around it and totally neglected the area. Thistles replaced the grasslands and the area looked like a mess. Then they constructed nature and made it into a tourist attraction that was said to relate to the 'natural beauty' of the village. That is not how I remember it, it doesn't make any sense'. Johan's recollection demonstrates that while experiences accumulate, dissonance may grow, causing perceptions to change. Choosing not to look allows inhabitants to continue to perceive an environment as they know and want it to be.

Ways of listening

Sounds of boats passing by, birds in the sky, tourists finding their way on the dike while riding their bikes, the river streaming by, dogs playing along the riverside, children laughing, the ferry reaching shore, and – up until recently – work on the shipyard, created a symphony of sounds that painted a picture of life in Millingen. Hearing those sounds and also being able to hear almost nothing, Jan Hubbers explained, allows you to perceive the richness and tranquility of Millingen that make it the extraordinary village it is. Just like not being able or willing to look, the absence of sounds is again incredibly informative in the way the environment is being perceived. For example, without the sound of geese during winter - when they are looking for a warmer environment - your 'feeling of winter', I was told, is not complete. Sounds indicate where you are, which season it is and, with a trained set of ears according to Jan, even what time of the day it is.

Added to such nonverbal sounds are phrases that express environmental appreciation, like: 'Look at that ship! Isn't it beautiful?', 'Have you seen the birds up there? And those sounds they make! I think they are looking for food, maybe a fishermen got lost!'. When listening, one hears a lot of talking about the river, inhabitants expressing a sense of belonging by describing it as *their* river and *their* village that connects to it. While choosing their words carefully, inhabitants construct stories that others listen to upon a nonverbal soundscape of life on a Dutch riverside.

Perceiving through making

When research participants stressed the importance of knowing how to perceive the environment based on experiences of the past, they appealed to the power of

imagination. I found that the importance that was placed on imagination derived from a belief that once you learn to see the environment from a local perspective, you should be able to see the past and maybe even the future. When participants engaged me in a walk down memory lane, whether this was by paintings, photographs or stories they told, they appealed to my roots in the village to assure I could somehow experience the past as they experienced it first handedly. In doing so, inhabitants drew on structures of environment in the present, accompanied them with realities of the past and went on philosophizing about the future. Smiles, laughter, and even tears accompanied these constructed events, which made them into experienced, very real and personal moments that supported the way inhabitants perceived their environment.

I explored the importance of imagination by engaging research participants in creative endeavors in which I asked them to capture their perception of the river in relation to their everyday lives. The drawing made by ten-year old Igor is an interesting example where experience and memory collide. Igor started out by mapping out associations he had when he thought about the Rhine. Based upon that, Igor created a drawing that showed the structures of the dike above and below the water, while he also drew a detailed picture of the shipyard, a ship, the river and a car

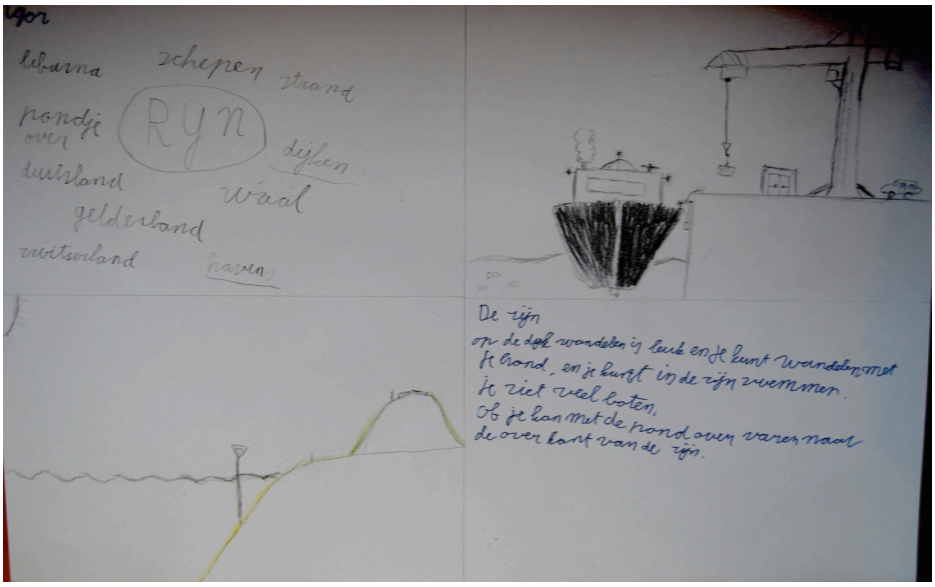

Figure 7 Drawing by Igor

parked next to it. I asked Igor how he had learned about those elements. He responded by saying that it was something he learned from his dad and that in drawing the shipyard he combined things he saw on the dike. A great deal of creativity was involved in producing the image that, despite not conforming to the visual

representation ‘out there’, included elements that were very real to Igor. By combining what he heard, saw and *knew*, Igor constructed a representation of how he perceives life along the river.

The results of participatory video projects showed similar explorations of the reciprocity between experience and perception. For instance, I asked Henk van Haren to film his last day working at the shipyard. In doing so, he zoomed in on structures of ‘his environment’, such as metal chains and the crane he used to work in. These were the things that mattered to him and that figured in his recollections about the place he worked. The audiovisual imagery communicated his way of perceiving, including the sounds belonging to this very process. The importance of sound was emphasized by the way Henk responded to the events he filmed. Without seeing any ship in sight (the camera was not properly operated at that time), Henk recognized the sound of a ship leaving the ramp of the shipyard and was excited to elaborate on what he captured. ‘Do you hear those cables? It’s all old, but it functioned. It’s the last ship we worked on, leaving the shipyard’[18].

Figure 8 Henk van Haren; steel cable on shipyard

Instead of capturing moving images and sounds, other research participants chose to put elements of the environment to a standstill by taking pictures or making paintings and placing these in their homes. When I asked about their significance I was told that keeping such visual reminders brings a piece of the river and its splendor, tranquility and social history inside your home where it is always nearby. Even when it is not your own captured image – or interpretation – of the environment, it provides locals a

[18] Translation by me

site to which they attribute personal memories and sentiments. That way, when there is no time to visit the river, you can still connect with it. 'The materiality of its presence enables you to look, touch, and experience the environment in a certain way'[19], Albert Janssen explained.

Figure 9 Picture in house of Albert Janssen, former employee of shipyard Bodewes

In the process of creation, research participants were given space to explore not only visual but also other affective realms of the ways they perceive their environment. I received a letter by Margret in which she elaborated on her relationship with the river. Starting with an explanation about her love for the river that developed with the love for her boyfriend who grew up in Millingen, Margret notes how she experienced a '*new dimension of life. It's like I experience seasons more intensely. Every day is different when you live next to the Rhine. Sun, wind, hail, rain, snow, I experienced it. Water. A new sensation unfolded the first time water levels rose. Now I laugh about the tourists who, armed with cameras, walk on the dike to get a glimpse of the – to them- unknown excitement. I watch and am being watched. Sometimes we wave at each other, things and people passing by'*[20]. Further, she notes how the river inspires her. She can tell anything to the river, and the river tells anything to her. It is there to stay, yet always on the move. Not only did the river characterize home, it was also imbued with personal sentiments and attributed meanings that informed Margret's way of perceiving.

[19] Translation by me

[20] Translation by me

Generations of perception

The foundations of perception are rich. While the way of perceiving the environment is intrinsically personal, reliant on the ongoing translation between sensory clues, experiences, memories and embodied knowledge, it continues to connect to others by the virtue of *sharing* experiences within the same locality of the village. And because of this, familiar ways of connecting with the river are able to move across generations. Many research participants addressed a certain 'culture of living with the water' that sets Millingen apart from other villages. Their stories and own experiences created a culture of water and land, a culture that taught to see, hear and experience life with the river in its? environment. However, my research shows that this does not homogenize the way Millingen is being perceived. On the contrary, because the process from which embodied knowledge derives, after importance is attributed to certain elements within the environment, is inherently creative and personal. Therefore it creates room for endless variations in perceiving the same environment.

In the light of the ongoing developments and increased variations of perceiving, one research participant expressed considerable doubt to whether Millingen would ever live *with* the water again as opposed to living next to it. Without a socially shared need to involve ourselves with the river its meaning was doomed to fade, I was told. The perceptions I encountered do not express signs that underpin this concern. While they do indicate that there is more room for interpretation as a result from changes in mobility, the shared locality of the small-scale village of Millingen bounds experience in such a way that it continues to connect locals to shared structures within the environment. As a result, a perceived reality seems to travel across generations by being embedded in the same environment that perpetuates the river its value within life in Millingen. Research participants from all generations recalled how they would walk along the riverside with their parents or grandparents, for example. And hence, 'as long as you are rooted in the village', I was reminded, 'you live *with* the water. It shapes the environment and hence becomes part of who you are, an inhabitant of Millingen, a person from land and water'[21]. 'No matter how our environment is being changed, water continues to attract. That will never change[22]'.

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[21] Quote by Erik Janssen on his felt connection with Millingen and the river. Translation by me.

[22] Quote by one of the visitors of *het Leugenbankje.* My translation.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

I embarked on my fieldwork with the challenge to combine characteristic anthropological modes of inquiry with the creative freedom granted by using audiovisual methods. Having experienced the freedom and self-reflexivity that working with art is able to evoke myself[23], I was curious how processes of creating could contribute to the scientific research paradigm on which anthropology relies. Drawing on the Writing Culture debate (Clifford and Marcus 1989), I gave extra attention to the voices in the field through various ways of perceiving the local environment. Placing perception at the core of this research could lead, or so I presumed, to insights on how people support and maintain their being in the world in times of change. By asking my research participants to engage in various creative endeavors I aimed to probe more deeply into the foundations of perception. Whether these processes would involve filming, photographing, drawing, painting or writing; I considered all of them as important sources of knowledge. Simultaneously I myself used a video-camera with microphone to explore the environment through my own seeing, listening, and reflecting.

Audiovisual methods

Using audiovisual modes of inquiry, inspired by the critique posed in the Writing Culture debate I placed great emphasis on understanding the construction that took place both in the field and upon return, With the limits of presenting knowledge of society in written form being recognized, new forms of visual representations began to offer audiences a means to address its richness and depth (Banks 2007). Ethnographic film, which already emerged before the Writing Culture debate had reached its pivotal moment in time, became an audiovisual tool and medium for doing so (ibid.). Yet the search to overcome the way language had been privileged within the academic conventions of anthropology was not sufficiently answered by the emergence of ethnographic film, and new pathways towards anthropological methodologies and strategies of representation were paved (Schneider and Wright 2013).

As a result, the ongoing challenge of interpretation and representation was placed against a backdrop of 'old' anthropological methodologies and new

[23] I am a visual artist working with various materials in creating drawings, photographs, paintings and sculptures.

representational possibilities. A growing interest was directed towards hybridization between anthropology and other disciplines that could help the academic discipline to acknowledge the locality of its ethnographic research. Special attention has been granted to the hybridization between art and anthropology. While one could argue that we are still in the midst of this process of hybridization (See Schneider and Wright, 2007; 2010), some promising works and insights have already moved to the fore, stretching the boundaries of anthropology while asking the 'reader' to engage in new ways of knowing[24]. Images, structures and sounds enriched their somewhat static textual predecessor and by doing so the methodological arena of anthropological inquiry opened its doors for a study *through* senses (Howes and Classen 2014, Ingold 2000**,** Pink 2009).

Art in anthropology

In exploration of the hybridization between art and anthropology, Schneider and Wright (2007) argue that artists and anthropologists share a set of common practices that raise ethical issues similar to one another, relating back to the crisis of representation that marked the Writing Culture debate. Instead of interpreting art from an anthropological standpoint, their exploration focuses on the making of art as an anthropologist. By doing so they signal a shift oriented towards engaging in praxis, noting that there is much that artists and anthropologists can learn from each other. Elaborating on this, Grossman (2014) adds that instead of applying artistic modes of inquiry to anthropological ones, the challenge is to work with the artistic dimensions that exist within anthropology already.

Drawing the artistic dimensions within anthropology back to its place in the environment, Ingold (2010:23) states that 'we must recognize in the power of the imagination the creative impulse of life itself in continually bringing forth the forms we encounter, whether in art, through reading, writing or painting, or in nature, through walking in the landscape'. Reality and imagination can't be separated, just like the self and the environment can't be separated (Ingold 2013). The key lies within acknowledging the implicit knowledge that is learned through an all-encompassing sensorial engagement, that becomes meaningful when recognized, creating affective

[24] Reading is akin to seeing, hearing or other sensorial ways in which ethnographic data may be communicated through works of art (Ingold 2000). Knowing, here, is the process of learning through engaging with texts or other forms of representations.

and effective responses (ibid. 736). Creating art is telling a story, at once performing an act of remembrance and moving on in continuity with values of the past. It creates a site to probe into the world of experience and the significance that lies in it (Ingold 2000:11). Placing the latter at the heart of the anthropological inquiry, I argue, underpins the importance of studying through the body and emphasizes the need to secure a certain space within the applied methodologies in which the life processes of remembering, perceiving, making and being in the world, can unfold.

Fieldwork process

I started out my fieldwork by 'learning' the field through participant observations both with and without my video-camera. Peter Loizos underlines how the camera does not only record but also generates reality (1993:6). Being 'native' to the field in which you study is often perceived as a possible obstacle due to lack of cultural distance (Bourgeois 2012). However, this can be countered by shifting identifications within the field (Narayan 1993:671). The presence and use of a video camera in this process can serve as a beneficiary tool in doing so, where it placed me outside of the ordinary and opened up a space where my presence in the field and the gathering of audiovisual material was negotiated.

Yet, the focus should not be on 'being native' or not, but on the quality of relations we as researchers seek to represent (Narayan 1993:672). By walking on the dike or along the riverside with my camera I engaged with the people I encountered through the process of filming. Upon this base a series of relations developed and information was shared. Informal talks and interviews followed and created an iterative process of deconstruction and collaboration in which the people I engaged with became research participants. Through elicitation (see Banks 2007, Harper 2002, Rose 2012) the research participants got to 'glimpse oneself as one might be or might have been' (Jackson 2013:10), which further emphasized the process of construction I intended to acknowledge. Just like the painted landscape that Hirsch (1995) elaborated on, the audiovisual methodology emphasized the relation between an ideal and reality and attributed agency to my research participants to be the ones communicating their own analysis of the situation. Consequently, it allowed research participants to be 'subjects with voices, views and dilemmas' (Narayan 1993:672), to which I, as a researcher, became bonded by ties of reciprocity.

The connections that were established in the field continued to develop by asking research participants to engage in creative processes themselves. These 'creative research methods' shaped a process of making where I gave my research participant minimal instructions and maximum personal space and time. Some participants explained that they only needed an hour and preferred me to stay, while others expressed the need to take their time and think about what they wanted to make. Eventually, research participants presented me the materializations of their imaginations: drawings, paintings, letters, videos and photographs. These materializations functioned as a product of personal recollection, on which I could probe deeper into their experiences and memories. When knowledge as experience is externalized into an object, its meaning is opened up (Grimshaw, Owen and Ravetz 2010:153), where it is exposed, negotiated and evaluated, eventually leading to new ways of knowing.

I recorded the creative processes when I was present. I aimed to enroll myself in the activity of 'living through' another person's memory (Grossman 2014), that I expanded with my own experience and emotions, using the camera as an embodiment of my own being[25] in the field. This allowed multiple ways of being and perceiving to coexist in a single place (Coover 2009). Consequently, using the video-camera allowed different kinds of ethnographic knowledge to be generated, as well as different types of collaborations with my research participants.

Thinking through making

In a lecture on 'thinking through making', Ingold (2012) points out that by making, the maker has to join his life with the materials he is working with. Through this process of engagement, inside knowledge is generated. Knowing is hence connected to the very sensorial being in this life. Thinking through making, hence, lies at the heart of the creative methods I employed.

First, I captured fragments of life in Millingen by using my camera. I approached each piece of collected audiovisual material as an individual entity of knowledge and meaning that only in congregation with other pieces could work as a way of addressing the layers of experience on which perception is built. By presenting

[25] By not using a tripod I aimed to do justice to the 'flow' and movements of the everyday life as a way of engaging myself in it, rather than me capturing it.

some of these mosaics of material to my research participants, I tried to evoke responses on 'my way of perceiving'. This created a new way of elicitation in which I became as much a researcher as the one being researched.

Added to the above, I asked some of my research participants to film 'their environment' or to share home-videos with me that, according to them, communicated something about their relation with the environment. The latter was also done through the use of photographs. After engaging in this activity, research participants expressed how they felt they looked at their environment 'with new eyes'. After asking what these 'new eyes' were, it became clear they were mostly informed by what 'outsiders' needed to see in order to get a sense of what life in Millingen, or work on the shipyard (as seen in the example of Henk van Haren, page 35), entailed. Interestingly, research participants only focused on elements in the environment from up close *(see figure 10)*, leaving out any contextualization that could actually help to make sense of what they thought outsiders should see. This finding raised awareness on the importance of the way the environment is structured and becomes meaningful, according to the inhabitants. In sketching a way to perceive the environment of Millingen, details matter most and the wider context goes unnoticed as relevant information's for outsiders to obtain. This might be due to the familiarity of the environment, causing it to be more or less taken for granted.

Figure 10, Stills from participatory video recordings of Henk van Haren and Elly Scholten

In continuing the creative approach I tried to pursue I also asked a selection of research participants to write about their relationship with the environment and the river in particular, noting that writing is a visual practice too (Ingold 2010). The implicit and more explicit dimensions of one's life merged into a verbalized notion objectified through a piece of paper, while the research participant had the freedom to add and delete information in his or her own place and time (see letter Margret Arntz page 36, 37). The piece of paper became a site on which information could be read both in and between the lines, allowing further probes into its meaning.

Asking my research participants to draw or paint their relationship with the

river, with minimal instructions given, made a move away from mere rationality possible. It can be seen as a process of auto-ethnography, as described by Arjang Omrani (2014:11), where one elaborates on 'their personal experience and the feelings and emotional states relative to that experience in an interactive condition'. The tangibility of this site added to its importance, where it asked people to work with different materials, touching different surfaces and producing different textures. The simple question of "what did you draw?" was then already sufficient to awaken a set of evocations and recollections. Figure 11 is an example of this method, a visual project created by eleven-year old Kim.

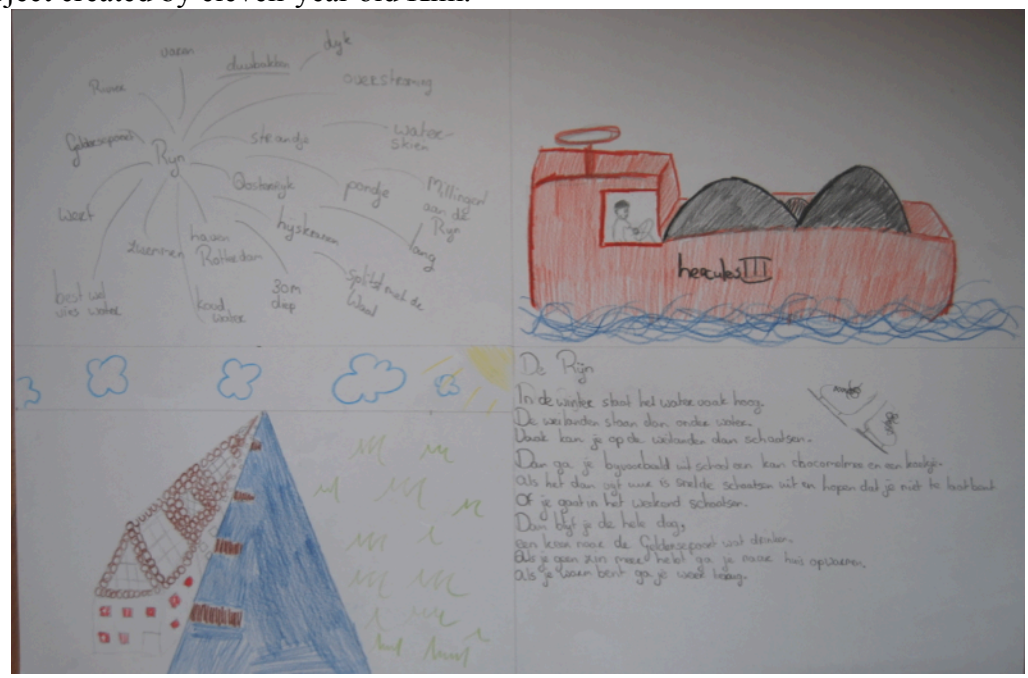

figure 11. Boat and houses along riverside representing Millingen, made by Kim (11).

While Kim wrote about ice-skating on flooded riverbeds during the winter and the way she remembered how she got hot chocolate afterwards either at the 'Gelderse Poort', a café located on the dike, or at home (bottom right), her drawings became a reference of how Millingen is connected to the river, and the qualities she attributes to life in Millingen when she is near the river. In the course of this exploration layers of meaning were slowly unraveled within a relationship between me and her.

Building further upon the artistic methodology of thinking through making that I applied in my relationship with my research informants, I was eager to discover potential additional contributions of art practice for me as a researcher. And indeed, experimenting more with creative methods made me 'learn' the field, again, by exploring the importance of visual tokens within the environment. By scanning its surfaces, analyzing the filmed footage and retracing it with pen and paper, I

developed a deeper understanding of the surroundings and was able to see things that originally had escaped my sight.

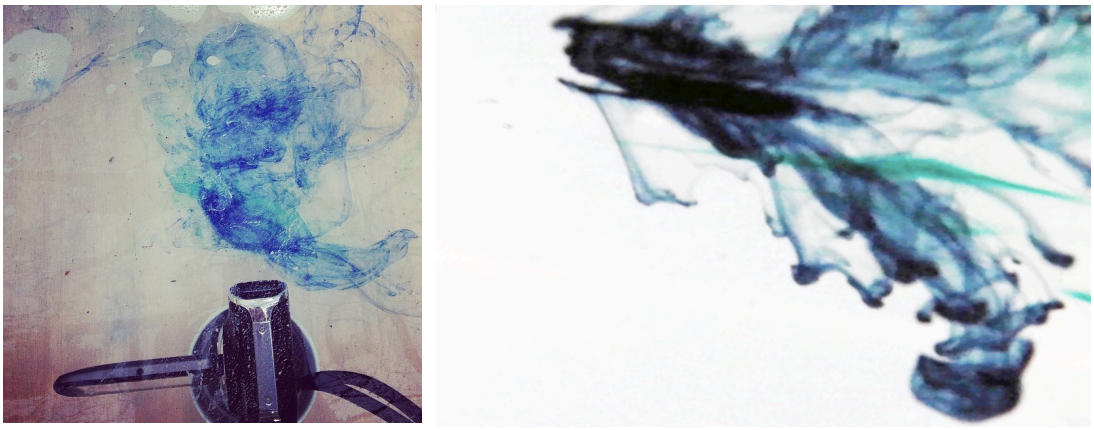

Figure 12, 13. Ink in water tank, part of creative research employed

For example, I added blue and green ink into a water tank filled halfway and placed a small camera underwater. The colors resembled the colors of the landscape of Millingen, whereas the ink created a direct relation with drawing-materials as well as flowing water. The ink highlighted the flow of the water about two seconds after it landed upon its surface and created dreamlike flows that for me functioned as visualizations of the process of remembrance. When I touched the water tank the flow of ink stopped abruptly, after which it found a new way, still resembling the dreamlike flow I first encountered, but strikingly less consistent. This event made me question the effect of control and change in an environment. Boundaries may be put up, and control might be expressed, but what does this actually *do*?

Adopting such artistic approaches with the collected ethnographic data also helped me think about the forms of representation I could include in my film. It was after trying out several ways of editing the film, rubbing pieces of audiovisual material against each other to let meaning emerge, that I eventually felt the need to play more with the various layers of information in the collected material. The result of this was the creation of about a dozen paper boats that were then set out to float, carried by the flow of the river. The material for these boats consisted of pieces of paper, imprinted with photographs - of past and present as I had encountered it in Millingen - drawings, newspaper articles, screenshots of home-videos, and a selection of transcribed interviews handwritten by myself. This way I appropriated the information of others for my own creativity. Every fold I made in the paper

highlighted a piece of information, while it moved another piece to the background or even into the invisible. With the folds increasing, more information became layered, connected and intertwined, gaining meaning but losing its initial visual richness. In a play with the materialized form of events that took place I was able to touch the complexity of memory as it may unfold itself in everyday life. It made me realize that many things remain unseen and yet are perceivable (Spyer 2008:16) as meaningful parts of life in Millingen, as long as they are connected in a whole of memorized events. Hence, the pieces of paper I worked with became symbols for the functioning of embodied knowledge in Millingen. When I went to the riverside and placed the paper boats in the water, they had become small units of perception that went along with the flow, and adapted their trajectory on and along the river when needed. Watching this event take place highlighted for me the delicacy with which perception in relation to changes in the environment should be studied.

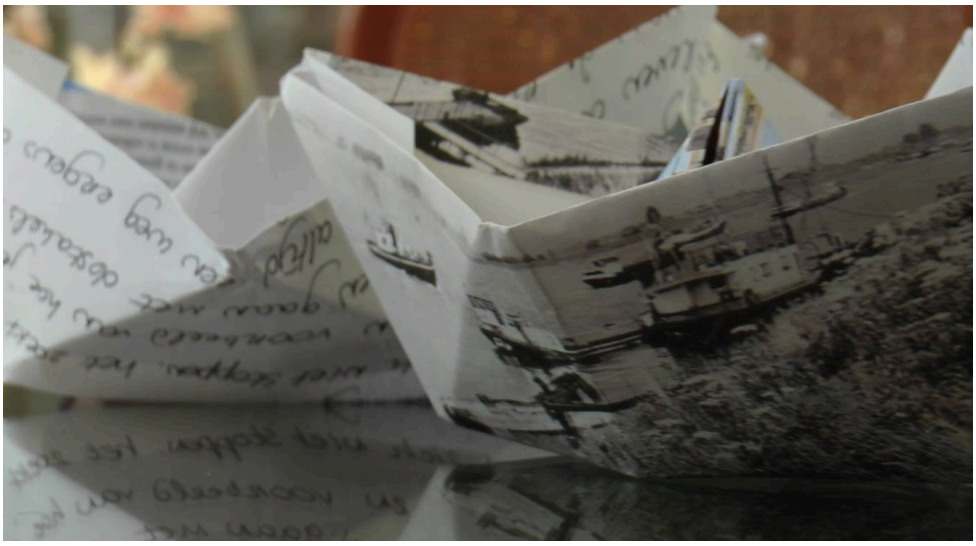

Figure 14. Screenshot of boats folded from written letters and photographs

Communicating through film

The ways inhabitants of Millingen aan de Rijn perceive their environment, including all the policies affecting it, proved to be an outcome of a shared locality filled with numerous experiences and memories. Perception itself, therefore, could not directly be addressed nor could it be directly represented. The different layers upon which perception was built only gradually unfolded themselves based on time, space and the relationship I had with my research participants. Having placed construction at the heart of my fieldwork, I wanted to do so in the film as well. Therefore I needed to transcend the more common naturalism in the ways of editing, in order to do justice to

my ethnographic findings, showing their constructed nature. In doing so I draw from a tradition of experimental cinema from the 1920s in conjunction with the recent movements of anthropology and art and anthropology of the senses (see for example Grossman and Kimball 2013). This includes moving away from presenting a linear narrative in order to allow different sensorial and emotional pathways of memory, experience and knowledge 'to probe into the world of experience and the significance that lies in it (Ingold 2000:11)'. This aim is reached by applying multilayered non-linear cinematic techniques that are meant to *evoke* rather than show.

In producing *As the water flows: Sensing realities* I have created an audiovisual presentation that includes the anthropological foundations of perception together with the artistic and sensorial dimensions as I encountered them. In my film I primarily focus on the visual tokens that perform as clues that unlock doors towards perception, and that through their visibility can be shared and recognized (Ingold 2000:22). When investigating the seen and the unseen, it is important to note that not everything happens at once (De Waal 2013). Hence, my film does not tie any loose ends together but rather evokes sentiments of recognition and alienation. It invites the audience to pry into various ways in which inhabitants of Millingen attribute meaning to their environment. Accordingly, my film touches upon various partial storylines, not *the* story, and asks the viewer to explore his or her own way of perceiving life in Millingen aan de Rijn.

CONCLUSION

A long history of environmental and policy-inflicted changes has reconstructed the environment of Millingen aan de Rijn. Inhabitants of the village witnessed a series of adjustments in *their* landscape, made in favor of the Dutch water management policy. The winter of 1995 became a moment where the efficacy of these changes was put to the test, and proved to be sufficient. By choosing to focus on the inhabitants' feeling of safety, the mayor of Millingen appropriated the national evacuation-policy to the local reality she was familiar with. As a result, inhabitants were able to hold on to a feeling of safety that relied on their connection with the village. As the years passed, new policies manifested themselves in Millingen while no flood risk like 1995 occurred. The need for even *more* changes became questioned among the locals while policy-makers failed to provide an answer. It is a poignant contrast to the situation twenty years ago. The emphasis that the municipality of Millingen at the time placed on executing policy locally suggests the importance for the linear, governmentally shaped, policies to seek local appropriation. However, with more attunement between the different discourses on safety, more trust in policies and their efficacy may grow.

In order to reach this aim, it is important to understand the foundations of the local notions of safety. With the current environmental changes leading the inhabitants to question how safe they *really* are in the current expert interpretation of water-security as it is implemented in their village, inhabitants turn to themselves in search for the answers they need in order to feel safe. Locals confront their changing environment by mapping the current situation and evaluate this upon a trajectory of previous experiences in which the socio-historical value of the river is prominently featured. In line with Ingold's work on self and environment (2000) inhabitants emphasize their being in the world on their long-term embeddedness within the village and appeal to their environment, and in particular the river, as a part of who they are. However, I found that in doing so the self is less individual and more communal than Ingold's analysis claims. The social structures and shared history of living with the river, as experienced in Millingen, have gained immense attention among locals in order to cope with the insecurities that environmental changes imposed on them. Having peers who experience the same threat but also the same splendor the environment has to offer provides the safety locals seek when outside interpretations appear to conflict with a local reality. This is not to deny the individual

processes that take place in the mind. Rather, this research underpins the need to add another layer of social-communal influences that may be just as important as 'the self'.

Inhabitants construct their environment by drawing on distinctive features that signify their relationship with the river and thereby allow Millingen to continue as their 'home'. The increasingly individualized engagement with the river due to its socio-economical decline is countered by the small-scale of the village that enables inhabitants to share experiences on a regular basis. Hence, the pathways to perceiving the environment are inherently social and allow the social and natural richness of the environment to define *living with the river* in Millingen aan de Rijn. By continuing to engage with the environment locals perpetuate their social and personal history with the river in the present. Combined with a keen awareness on how to appropriate to oneself the changing structures within the village, inhabitants are able to cope with the natural and cultural insecurities that confront them. Future research may point out how and whether the local history is able to remain part of the present now that fewer inhabitants draw their connection with the river from first-hand experiences with its socio-economical value.

Studying the richness and variety of perception locally made it necessary to go beyond the core ethnographic methodological guidelines of participant observation and interviews. When boundaries are stretched and methodologies redefined, it becomes the challenge to make their added value concrete. Art as a methodology offers anthropology creative techniques of gathering, exploring and constructing ethnographic data. In my research it enabled me to explore different dimensions of perception and it allowed me to probe deeper into the affective and sensorial ways in which locals experience their ways of being in the world. I believe that the constructedness of art provides a solution for the critique in the Writing Culture debate by giving different realities a voice without falling into hierarchical ways of representing. My research, and in particular my film, aim to do so while they offer audiences sensorial ways of engaging with a locality that has been placed under anthropological inquiry.

APPENDIX

TIMELINE: structuring of the film

00.00 – 03.04: The film starts by constructing the evacuation of 1995 in which both the outsider's perspective (by including media-reports on the situation) as local perspectives (through the use of home-videos and a recollection of what one of the inhabitants experienced at that time).

03.05 – 07.56: Departing from the situation of 1995, inhabitants reflect on the local way of perceiving the river and its rising water levels. By drawing on their experience with, and personal knowledge about the river, locals indicate how they cope with its dynamics as a common feature of their life in Millingen.

07.57 – 10.22: Here, inhabitants hint at how living with the river and its changes may proceed. By reflecting on a way of looking at the river, this part of the film addresses the lessons water has taught, and is still able to teach. Importance is attributed to elements within the environment and characteristics of the river.

10.23 – 15.25: In the context of change, the film moves towards the social and economical source the river used to be for the village and its inhabitants. Through a focus on the industrial elements within the environment, both on land and water, this sequence underpins that developments continue. Experiences of how the village and locals used to benefit from their proximity become communicated by addressing the older generation inhabitants.

15.26 – 19.15: Continuing, the film moves to the younger generation inhabitants and their way of perceiving the river. It combines reflections on what it is like to grow up in the environment of Millingen with the perceived reality of 'living with the river' among youngsters currently living there. By including drawings and parts of letters that were written, various way of 'perceiving through making' are embedded and connected to elements in the environment that are 'out there' to see.

19.16 – 24.04: This last part of the film concentrates on the current-day situation of living with, and perceiving, the river. It focuses on different ways locals and non-locals (tourists) move in the environment and emphasizes how, despite different rhythms and different ways of engaging, the water attracts and connects people in a single locality: Millingen aan de Rijn.

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