



Punching, kicking, stroking and rocking: Glowb calms you during a psychological crisis.

Design by Maik de Rooij

Text by Pieter Desmet

A ball. That is what this piece is about. So, nothing new. After all, as long as there have been people, we have been playing with balls. In the *Odyssey*, Homer describes the ball game of princess Nausicaa and her friends. Ball games are depicted on ancient Egyptian monuments, and have been extensively described by the Romans. In short, the ball is everywhere. It plays the leading role in more than 50 sports, from football to billiards, juggling, tennis and bowling. And yet, you can design a *new* ball; one that is different from all existing balls. That is what Maik de Rooij did. With Glowb, he designed an interactive ball for a special group in a special situation: A ball to regulate tension during a psychological crisis in adolescent psychiatry.



Research with patients and sociotherapists

Karakter

Maik designed the ball for Karakter, a centre for child and adolescent psychiatry. Karakter offers diagnostics and treatment of ADHD, autism, anxiety disorders, OCD, behavioural disorders, psychosis and other psychiatric problems to children and adolescents of 0-23 years old. Patients can come to Karakter for an Intensive Home Treatment (IHT). This concerns an intensive treatment at home, but during a crisis, temporary hospitalisation is possible in the High & Intensive Care (HIC), a relatively new form of short-term clinical hospitalisation in mental healthcare. Such hospitalisation is used in case of a severe psychological crisis. With HIC, patients can be helped in a dignified manner, in an environment where safety and protection are combined with respectful care and treatment.

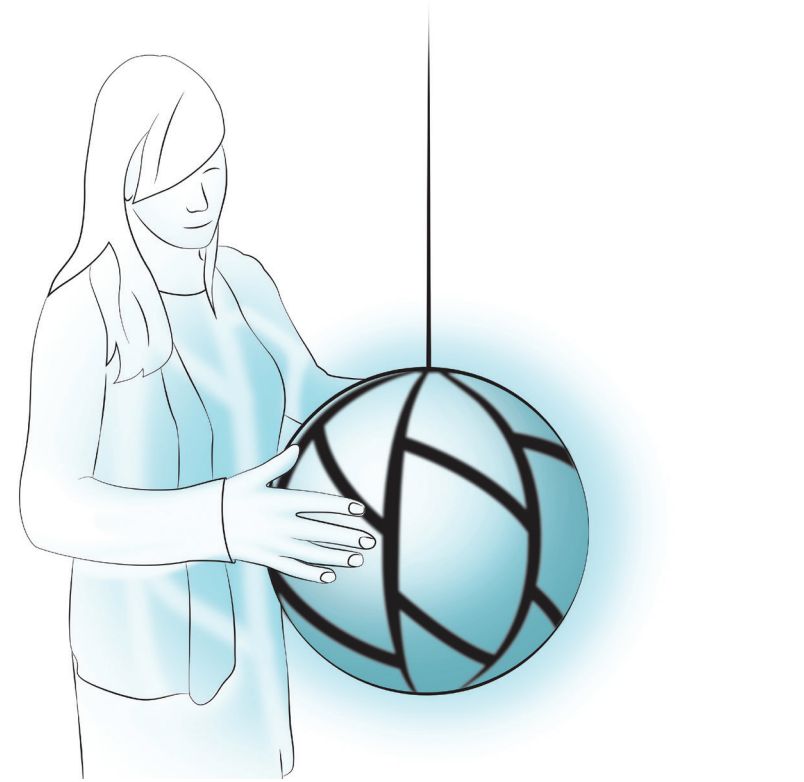
Comfort room

A central location in the HIC centre is the *comfort room*. That is a room where restless or anxious

patients can have a moment to themselves. It is a one-person room, with a possibility for one-on-one supervision. Patients indicate when they wish to make use of this room, on a voluntary basis. In the comfort room, they can relax in a comfortable and pleasant environment so as to prevent further escalation. The preventive effect of this room often means putting patients in isolation is no longer necessary. Comfort rooms have been designed as friendly and tranquil rooms with warm colours and furniture of soft materials.

Safety and autonomy

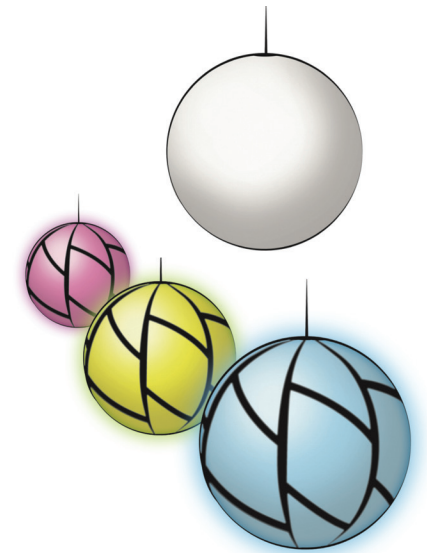
Maik's challenge was to design an 'object' for the new comfort room of the child and adolescent psychiatric centre in Nijmegen. The design serves to help patients during a psychological crisis. Can an object help regulate tension? In order to explore this, Maik had to study the characteristics of psychological emergency situations. Why causes the patients' crises? How do they cope with them?

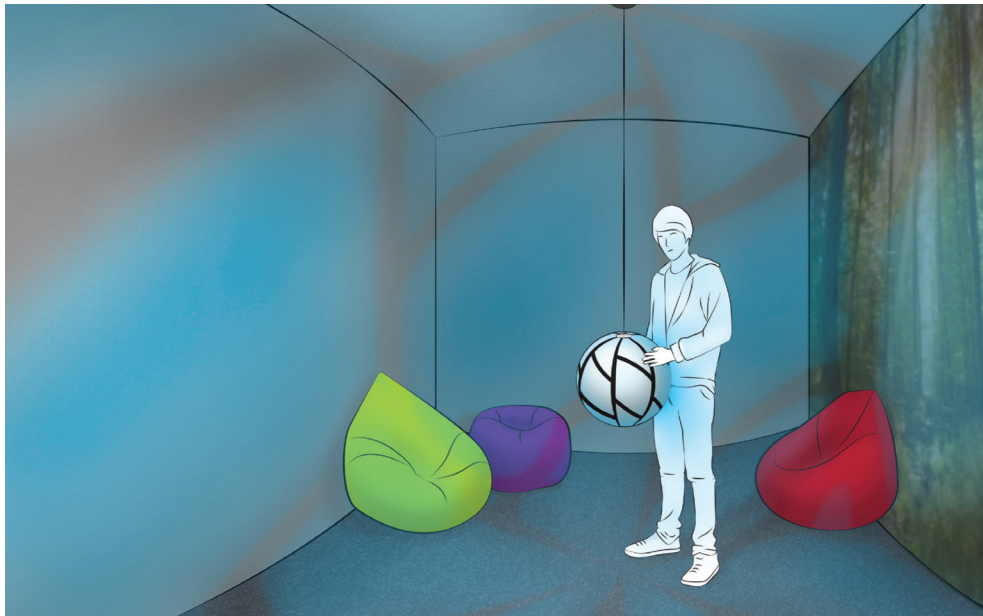


What is the role of their surroundings? What do they need and how can an object contribute to this? Maik observed the current situation. He spoke to carers, patients and parents. He distilled a leading theme from his findings: the balance between safety and autonomy.

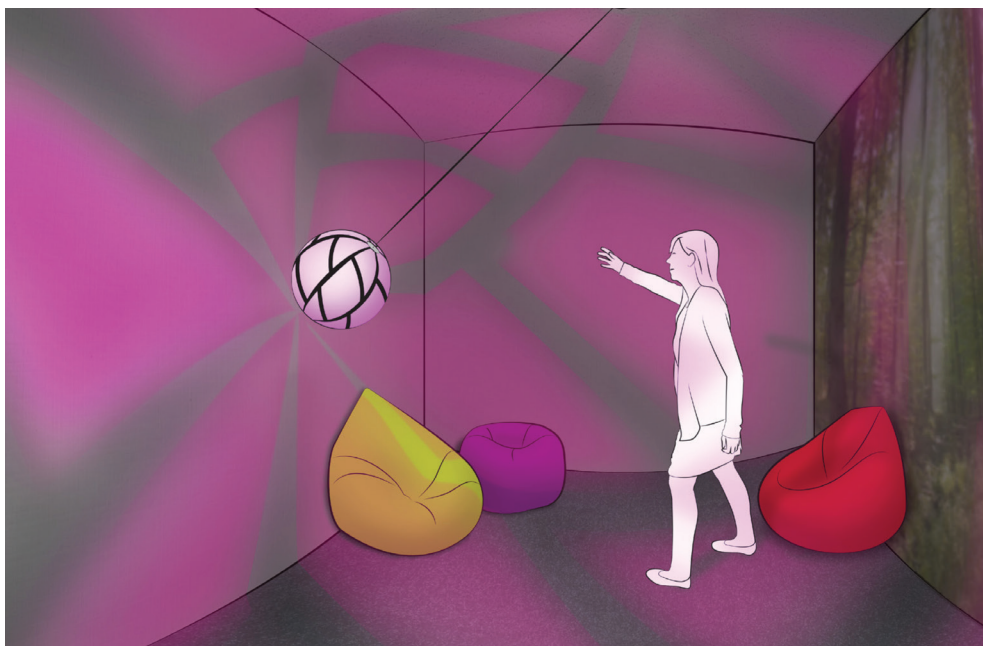
Glowb

During his research, Maik discovered that there is no one single need. There are various strategies to cope with crisis, and what strategy is effective depends on the phase the crisis is in. If you are frustrated or angry, you seek to express your negative energy in a physical way. But if you are anxious or psychotic, you need something that helps you to organise your thoughts. Sometimes, you wish to lose yourself in a fun activity, to escape from your own emotions. Glowb makes this possible. Glowb is a large, soft, elastic ball that hangs from the ceiling in the comfort room. You can use it in a fierce and active way, but also carefully and gently.





Glowb in careful interaction



Glowb in fierce interaction



Fierce interaction

You give Glowb a powerful punch. It bounces off the wall. This converts your negative energy into action. The ball makes a sound, radiates a bright light and bounces back. This demands a response; your attention shifts from your negative thoughts to the returning ball. How do you respond? Do you catch the ball, evade it or punch it again? The bright light reinforces the interaction by changing the entire environment. Glowb clearly shows: I heard you.

Careful interactions

You can also communicate more gently with Glowb. You stroke or rock it, or make it swing or spin. The ball reacts as expected: It moves gently, glows and slowly changes colour. You move your attention to the light effects that fill the room; soft colours that slowly merge into each other. The colours help you to calmly organise your thoughts. You take a moment to sit down and think about the situation. If you stop the interaction, the Glowb continues to glow softly.

Maik built a prototype to test his design. Users were very enthusiastic. They experience the light effects as a reflection of their own emotional condition and behaviour, making them more aware of their own feelings. The focus on the light effects helps to let go of negative thoughts, so new thoughts have room to form.

Psychiatry versus design

Before he met Karakter, Maik never would have thought he would be designing for a psychiatric centre. It was a completely new experience. He was particularly surprised by the similarities in work methods: "For me as a designer, it was certainly worthwhile to work with healthcare professionals. Their patient-oriented approach perfectly matched with how I learned to design: the user is always the focus." Currently, Glowb is being further developed and the design will be installed in comfort rooms. That is the best compliment a person can get for a graduation project.



Maik de Rooij (picture) developed Glowb as a thesis for the master's programme *Design for Interaction* at the TU Delft. The project was an initiative of Karakter child and adolescent psychiatry, with the goal to design an object that can contribute to tension regulation in a new *comfort room*. Thesis supervisors were Marieke Sonneveld, Susie Brand-de-Groot (TU Delft), Josephine Boots and Nancy Degen (Karakter). For more information: www.diopd.org

Colophon

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Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft University of Technology
The Netherlands

Product concept & design by Maik de Rooij

Text by Pieter Desmet
Photographs and images by Maik de Rooij
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Graphic design by Rozemarijn Klein Heerenbrink

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positive design

The logo for TU Delft, featuring a stylized flame icon above the letters 'TU' in blue and 'Delft' in black.