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A Kaleidoscopic Biography of an Ordinary Landscape

Analysis of the Development of the Neighbourhood *Buiten Wittevrouwen* (Utrecht – the Netherlands)

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Abstract

Landscape is dynamic. Even during periods of relative permanence, its arrangement and appearance are gradually transformed as a result of changing spatial practices. This analysis of the neighbourhood *Buiten Wittevrouwen* provides some clues for a biographical approach that puts an emphasis on the social dimensions underlying the development process of landscape. Attention is paid to the ordinariness of landscape, emphasizing the importance of everyday practices. It is argued that the focus on meaning, representation and identity in landscape research should be supplemented (again) by an awareness of the effects of basal behaviour and sensations.

Keywords: landscape biography, Buiten Wittevrouwen (Utrecht), spatial order, spatial practices, transforming production

Introduction

Reconstructing the biography of a landscape is like trying to unscramble a scrambled egg. You just cannot do it. Due to the variety of authors, the multiplicity of their actions, as well as the evolving condition of social relations, any attempt to unravel the social processes that underlie the transformation of our physical world is reckless. Moreover, it would be an impossible challenge to describe in detail the reverse impact the environment had on the knowledge, perceptions and practices of people that lived in the past. In addition to this complexity regarding the interpretation of the cultural dimension of landscape, retrospection is simply bounded by a limited pool of historical information. Just as relics and traces piled up in the present-day landscape, the collection of manuscripts, maps, images and film pictures that fill our archives
and drawers are testimonies of life stories that have been much more versatile and divergent than they could ever reflect to us. The same goes for narratives and oral history. Taking this fact into consideration, it should be noted that landscape research from a biographical perspective is restricted by a rather selective and fragmented social memory. In other words, a full reconstruction of personal contribution is impossible (Samuels, 1979). Therefore, we have to acknowledge that we are inevitably confined to what I am calling a kaleidoscopic biography. This perspective implies that one can only study the reciprocal relation between man and landscape through time, by deducing both outlines and subtleties from glimpses of the past.

From this kaleidoscopic perspective, this chapter explores several clues for a biographical approach that puts an emphasis on the social dimensions underlying the development process of landscape. By examining the case of Buiten Wittevrouwen, it will be argued that human activities affecting the landscape successively are not random, but are to a high degree ‘structured’ by both an existing spatial order and a wider social order. Being one of the first urban developments that took place in the Dutch town of Utrecht at the end of the 19th century, the case illustrates the relation between social transition and spatial transformation. Although the continuity and dynamics of landscape are connected to the stability and change of institutions, spatial development is generated by people. Therefore, the role men of flesh and blood hold in the contextual genesis of their own surroundings is brought to the fore. By means of reconstructing the development of the neighbourhood, the nature of spatial practices shaping the physical appearance of the landscape is explored. Attention is paid to human conduct, stressing simultaneously its framed character and personal touch. Subsequently the focus shifts briefly to the mental aspects of landscape. Finally these different story lines are incorporated into a vision that emphasizes the ordinariness of landscape. One observation is that spatial practices are the sum of personal and collective acts not inevitably spatially directed, nor necessarily purposefully performed. Some points of departure are explored to study landscape as part of an ongoing process of transforming production of space, as it is driven by everyday life practices. The contribution of this chapter is the initiative it gives to link the biographical perspective on landscape to the geographical concept of social space. It focuses on a theme that is according to Kolen et al. (2010) at the heart of the biographical approach: landscape as a historically produced living environment.
Landscape Dynamics and Spatial Order

Generally, the design of a landscape is connected to a high degree with its past and extant uses. It can be interpreted as the temporary result of spatial practices, acted on the basis of mental ideas about its function and meaning, or performed from experience. In this discussion the concept of ‘spatial order’ as applied by the architectural historian Auke van der Woud (2004) is relevant, indicating the physical arrangement of the landscape produced by people, intentionally or not, and simultaneously related to both spatial perception and practice. In this sense landscape is the material outcome of a constant adaptation of our environment, a reflection of a socially produced spatial order, comprising a momentary synthesis of spatial design, spatial patterns of human behaviour and activities, as well as the blend of ideas, meanings, perceptions, attitudes and emotions about space. On the basis of the case Buiten Wittevrouwen, it is brought forward that changes in the spatial order – and consequently the transformation of the landscape – are often preceded by a transition in a wider social order.

Continuity of a Spatial Order

The neighbourhood Buiten Wittevrouwen is named after the Premonstratensians, a conventual order consisting of women (‘vrouwen’) known for their white (‘witte’) habits. Their nunnery was situated inside the walls of the town of Utrecht. For centuries the area outside (‘buiten’) the 12th-century moat was kept vacant, mainly for reasons of defence. The grounds within the field of fire were used as vegetable gardens by local tradesmen. Until the early 19th century this spatial order was more or less permanent. In fact, the coherence between the function and fabric that defined the identity of this landscape was based on an institutional continuity, which had its origin in two constitutive episodes in the town’s early history: the presence of the Roman castellum ‘Traiectum’ (1st–3rd century A.D.) and the Christianization of the Frisian and Saxon peoples by St. Willebrord, the first bishop of Utrecht (7th century A.D.). For a fairly long period, in the biographical approach often referred to as Braudel’s time span of the longue durée (Kolen, 2004), the invariability of the spatial order was dictated to a high degree by institutions that represented military and religious interests. As a large landowner, the Catholic church played a vital role in the exploitation of the land. Land-use regulations and other decrees issued by the town council resulted in a clear distinction between town and countryside, not only
in its physical manifestation, but also in a legal, political, economic and cultural respect. In the personal experience, city gates in those days acted as a filter between two spheres (Van der Woud, 2004). A citizen that left the town by passing the so-called Wittevrouwen gate would find himself on a paved road (Biltse Steenweg), along which a small suburb had developed since the Middle Ages. Here, outside the gateway, where the legal authority of the city council was restricted, a parasitic conglomeration grew, including companies that eluded local acts and excises. A few hospitals offered lodging for travellers and other non-citizens of the city (Heurneman & Van Santen, 2007).

Apart from the ribbon development along this arterial road, there was another particular feature in the – at that time – undeveloped area of Buiten Wittevrouwen, namely the Maliebaan (figure 12.1). In 1637 the city of Utrecht acquired a long strip (740 meters) of agricultural land and turned it into a playing field, as a gift to the newly founded university. Professors and students were allowed to play a game of pall mall (‘malie’) in the lane, which was planted with 1200 lime trees and 600 elms (Van Oudheusden, 1990). The upper middle class bought parcels bordering the leafy lane, initially as an investment, but after a short period ornamental gardens were laid

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1 In French: *paille maille*, from which the English ‘pall mall’ was derived.
out as a place of repose. Tiny tea houses were built, deviating from the line of building, to grasp an extensive view on the grand lane. This practice was formalized in 1730 by deciding on two distinct building lines, one for lots and one for tea houses. As is apparent from the composition of the facade, a compound of mainly 19th-century mansions, many of them with bay windows overlooking the street, had an effect on future architectural decisions (Heurneman & Van Santen, 2007). Hence, interpreted from a biographical perspective, ordinary conduct (‘street gazing’) clearly left an imprint on the landscape. Rules set to anticipate on evolved spatial practices structured new interventions.

Transition and Transformation

From around 1850 onwards the neighbourhood Buiten Wittevrouwen was gradually developed. The background of this transformation from a rural into an urban landscape lies roughly around the declaration of the Batavian Republic by Dutch patriots in 1795. When the former United Provinces became first a vassal state and from 1810 until 1813 an integral part of the First French Empire, a series of laws and regulations was implemented by the foreign ruler. At the same time steps were taken to create national uniformity and equality of rights by the introduction of a monetary union, a tax system, a legal system, levels of public administration and a central authority. According to Van der Woud (2006), normalization had a deep impact on the functioning of Dutch society as well as on the alteration of its landscape throughout the 19th century. Actually, the institutional shift under French supremacy had two consequences for the designation and development of the area of Buiten Wittevrouwen. Firstly, the dissolution of monasteries and the appropriation of ecclesiastical properties, as ordained by the French, led to the demolition of the last remains of the former Premonstratensian nunnery. The grounds fell into the hands of the municipality, which in 1824 decided to put up barracks on the property. The building of this military complex was part of the modernization of the Dutch defence system. At the beginning of the 18th century, with support of the French authority, an ambitious plan was conceived by lieutenant-general C.R.T. Krayenhoff to create a line of defences to protect the core of Holland. From 1815 onwards, under the reign of King Willem I, this plan was carried out.

Lying inside the main defence line, Utrecht became exempt from its function as a fortified town in 1814 and became a garrison town, on the eastern
side flanked by fortifications of the so-called *Nieuwe Hollandse Waterlinie* (New Dutch Water Defence System). As a result the town was no longer kept to the straight jacket of the medieval walls. Already in 1826, Mayor Van Asch van Wijck appointed a committee to study the possibilities of urban growth. Although a consistent plan was presented by the celebrated landscape architect and garden designer J.D. Zocher Jr., the Belgian Revolution and cholera epidemics in the 1830s delayed the scheme (De Klerk, 2008). Eventually, only a park was realized, situated on the site of the pulled-down town walls. It was not until around 1850 that the first substantial building activities took place outside the walls of the old city (Renes, 2005). The area of Buiten Wittevrouwen, at that moment situated between the existing town and a newly built fortification along the Biltstraat (Fort De Bilt), no longer lay in a fire-zone. So secondly, as a result of a project initiated under French supremacy, a significant condition for change in the spatial order occurred.2 The neighbourhood Buiten Wittevrouwen was one of the first new areas to be developed.

### The Process of Landscape Development

To recapitulate briefly, the case illustrates that both the invariability of a landscape as well as the occasion for its change are connected with the continuity and dynamics of a wider social order. Land-use decisions are bound by and shaped within the context of a variety of institutional structures – social, economic, political, legal – which in itself are subject to gradual and abrupt shifts in dominant values (De Klerk, 2008). Related to the consequences of this institutional embedding of the spatial order, two additional observations can be made which are relevant to a biographical approach. Firstly, the case reveals the geographic concept of openness, in the sense that it is not only the history of a place that defines its development through time. As geographer Doreen Massey has argued, regions and places are never closed entities (Cresswell, 2004). Unpredictable events may breach the path-dependence and cause ruptures in a settled spatial order. Therefore, one should always pay attention to socio-cultural, economic and political interaction and the resulting influences from outside on the development process of a landscape. Historical landscape research could

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2 As Andela (1993, p. 184) indicates for Dutch cities in general, the implementation of the so called *Gemeentewet* (1851) and the abolition of local taxes charged at city gates and barriers (1864) were also vital conditions for urban expansion.
benefit from this notion of permeability that arises from the interconnectedness of places.

Secondly, the case urges us to think differently about landscape stratification. Apart from the existing notion of material accumulation over time, it seems relevant to conceive landscape as being part of different spatial levels at one and the same time. As is shown by the example of Buiten Wittevrouwen, the initial condition for the development of the neighbourhood was closely related to the realization of a large-scale defence project, stretching to a total length of 85 kilometres and covering five Dutch provinces. Also on the local level, an intervention at one place can lead to a series of small interventions, as was shown by the transformation of farmers’ land into stately gardens after the construction of the Maliebaan. So, the distinct layers of time often discerned in biographical studies are in themselves not uniform of nature, but rather an abstraction of a complex process of intertwined activities and – as will appear from the following story lines – occasional affairs.

The next section turns to the embroidering character of the spatial development of Buiten Wittevrouwen. By looking at the growth process of this neighbourhood in some detail, it becomes clear that the urban fabric is neither the product of an elaborate plan nor the accidental outcome of a random process driven by anonymous forces. Instead it was produced in a fairly organic process by a collection of actors operating in a contextual and gradually changing framework of shared values and attitudes, existing spatial practices and formalized institutional structures. Apart from the influence of institutional frames and abstract socio-cultural relations on the urban design, the importance of ordinary behaviour and customs of people is raised by pointing out the effect of emerging recreational fashions on individual land-use decisions. This example brings up the trivial aspects about the development of landscape, a theme that will be explored in more detail below.

Apart from the altering interconnection between the design, use and mental aspects of landscape, the analysis of the growth process exemplifies that urban development in the second half of the 19th century did not occur on a tabula rasa. The pre-urban landscape contained the potentialities that were incorporated into the new urban pattern. On the basis of an analysis of the cadastral map from 1832 – a system of land registry as introduced under the French administration and afterwards continued by the new Dutch state – it will be clarified that not the landscape itself but the existing spatial order structured the transformation.
Framed Spatial Practices

The neighbourhood *Buiten Wittevrouwen* was built gradually in the period 1850-1900. There was no plan underlying the lay-out. Systematic urban development became compulsory only after the ratification of the first Dutch Housing Act in 1901 (Van der Cammen & De Klerk, 2003). Prior to the introduction of a legal framework with regard to urban development, two major institutional shifts occurred in Dutch society during the period from 1850 to 1900 that affected building activities. First of all, doctrinaire liberalism evolved into social liberalism, and secondly compartmentalization along socio-political lines arose under the awakening of Christian-democracy (De Klerk, 2008). Nowadays, traces left in the spatial arrangement and appearance of *Buiten Wittevrouwen* still reveal the effects these socio-cultural transfigurations had on spatial practices.

Spatial Development as Private Venture

Concerning the first shift, the development of liberalism in the late 19th century, it can be noted that the role of private initiative was significant for the construction history of *Buiten Wittevrouwen*. According to the map titled ‘Land Ownership’ (figure 12.2), a substantial part of the land was owned by people from the middle and upper class. As was common during this liberal epoch, landowners sold parcels of land to speculators who in turn resold it to individual contractors. Moreover, with an almost standard regime of public tender, the lowest bidder frequently was awarded. To be competitive, contractors cut costs by using inferior building materials (Krabbe, 2007). This mode of ‘speculative building’ resulted in an incoherent urban pattern and a considerable number of workers’ houses of poor quality. In 1868 a report of the local authority on the living conditions in Utrecht brought up the unacceptable circumstances in the expansion area *Buiten Wittevrouwen* (Van Oudheusden, 1990).

As has been reconstructed in an excellent way by spatial planner Len de Klerk (1998 & 2008), government intervention in different Dutch towns increased gradually around the turn of the century, as a result of the efforts of a small group of pioneers. From a shared complex of conceptions, convictions, attitudes and aspirations, they contributed individually and collectively to the introduction of both technical innovations and legal standards. It could therefore be asserted that most of *Buiten Wittevrouwen* was developed during a first phase of town planning, characterized by
Figure 12.2  Land ownership – situation according to the cadastral map of 1832

Catholic Church (horizontal stripe), Protestant Church (vertical stripe), upper-class (darkest tone), middle-class (dark tone), lower class (light tone) and farmers (lightest tone). The public roads (black lines) were the property of the municipality of Utrecht, except for the middle-lane of the Biltstraat which belonged to the State.

B = Suburb along the Biltstraat
H = Heilige Kruisgasthuis
M = Maliehuis (property of the municipality of Utrecht)
S = plot of Mrs. Speyaert van Woerden (Almshouses built in 1879)
T = Park Tivoli

Source: Kadastrale Atlas Utrecht 1832 – Abstede sectie A blad 1, adapted by John de Jong

a budding institutionalization of existing practices in the field of urban development, nourished by experiences and new understandings. It was through their participation in public debate, their scientific contemplations and the introduction of foreign inventions that particular people made a vital contribution to this process. An article published in a local newspaper
John de Jong confirms that the development of Buiten Wittevrouwen was at the time indeed the subject of public debate. The contributor (Broers, 1860) raised the question whether or not the municipality of Utrecht should draft a plan for such urban expansions. In line of the principles of classical liberalism,
he concluded that the costs of expropriation and the risk of speculation encompassed important obstacles for intervention.

While the development was carried out, the people involved responded to physical structures and elements already present in the landscape. Country lanes were upgraded to streets and consequently integrated into the new urban fabric of the neighbourhood. The map of the street pattern and field limits (figure 12.3), displaying a projection of the current location of roads on the cadastral map from 1832, shows that parts of the streets called Monseigneur van de Weteringstraat, Kerkstraat, Kruisstraat and Mulderstraat are aligned along the course of old country lanes. The same goes for the Nachtegaalstraat en Gasthuisstraat, although the latter was already a built-up street in 1832.

Apart from the corresponding location of roads, the relation between the street pattern and former field limits is striking. As is apparent from the oblique angle between the Tulpstraat and the Monseigneur van de Weteringstraat, road construction followed the earlier field pattern. The Tulpstraat was positioned along the central axis of an elongated lot, with buildings erected along both sides. The boundaries at the back of the building plots coincided with the long-standing property boundaries. This parcel-wise development, which is typical for the previously mentioned mode of speculative building, was also applied to the Adriaanstraat, Kerkdwarsstraat, Hovenstraat and Moesstraat. The eastern part of the Monseigneur van de Weteringstraat was positioned right on a field limit, as a continuation of an upgraded country lane at the western side. As a result, the size of the building plots was twice as big compared to those along the Adriaanstraat. Nowadays the urban landscape of Buiten Wittevrouwen is still marked by a social gradient more or less in accordance with the measurements of the building plots: stately villas along the Maliebaan, mansions along the Monseigneur van de Weteringstraat and middleclass dwellings along the Adriaanstraat (figure 12.4). Working-class houses were located along the Appelstraat, Moesstraat, Hovenstraat, Thinstraat and the southern part of the Tulpstraat. These dead-end streets were constructed on small fields. The current street names refer to the use of these grounds around 1850 as orchards and gardens (Heurneman & Van Santen, 2007).

3 Appelstraat (Apple Street), Moesstraat (Fruit Purée Street), Tulpstraat (Tulip Street), Hovenstraat (Garden Street).
Compartmentalization of society materialized in philanthropic housing construction and facilities. From personal engagement, wealthy individuals developed accommodation designated for members of a specific pillar of society. Already in 1749, Major Johan Breyer bequeathed to the Reformed Church a series of rent-free houses for poor people, located just outside the town’s moat. After 1850, several almshouses were built in the neighbourhood by clerical foundations and philanthropists, a practice originating in the Middle Ages. The style chosen was a reference to the denomination: the neo-Gothic style was used by the Catholics, the neo-Renaissance style by the Protestants. With regard to the facilities it can be noticed that apart from a monastery, churches and community centres, quite a few schools were founded. These buildings also had a signature referring to the disposition of the awarding authority. Public schools, for instance, were built in a sober neo-classicist style that was characteristic for public works such
as railway stations, jails and pumping-stations during the first half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{4}

The number of Catholic boys’ and girls’ schools in the neighbourhood is remarkable. Again, the socio-cultural context gives an explanation (Heurneman & Van Santen, 2007). The Catholic emancipation following the re-establishment of the Dutch episcopacies in 1853 led to a flourishing of faith-oriented education. The Education Act of 1857 made it possible to found a school for private education without governmental approval. A cluster of Catholic schools was located along the Adriaanstraat, Pallaesstraat and Deken Roesstraat on grounds that – as appears from the cadastral map – were already the property of the Catholic Church. Apart from the institutional circumstances mentioned, a dean called Th. S. Roes (“Parochiale scholen in de Adriaanstraat”, 1912) played an important role in the bloom of Catholic schools in Utrecht. A memorial stone bricked up in the facade of a school in the Adriaanstraat testifies to his pioneering

\textsuperscript{4} In Dutch known as the Waterstaatsstijl, after the National Water Board, employer of engineers that acted as architects for many official buildings as well as buildings belonging to the ‘official’ Dutch Reformed Church (Volkers & Van Schaik, 2001).
work. Another example of the influence a single person had on this socio-politically based development of Buiten Wittevrouwen was a lady called Speyaert van Woerden. She died in 1874, being the last female successor of an old aristocratic family. In accordance with her wishes her bequest was partly granted to almshouses designated for Catholic widows (figure 12.5). The houses were built in 1879 on a piece of land that had belonged to the lady. The almshouses are a fine example of neo-Gothic architecture and echo the revival of craftsmanship at the end of the 19th century.

Landscape for the Use of Leisure

It is not only shifts in the formal institutional situation that underlie spatial interventions at the local scale. Changes in habits and preferences in ordinary life equally have an impact on the development process of landscape. The influence of behaviour on land-use decisions becomes apparent from the way landowners in the area of Buiten Wittevrouwen adapted to altering modes of leisure. From 1860 onwards, numerous tea houses along the Maliebaan were converted into country houses and mansions. Furthermore, a number of societies, established after the latest fashion, settled with their club rooms along the avenue because of its grandeur.5

An exceptional phenomenon was Park Tivoli, situated at the Kruisstraat. In 1823, a public café was opened on this site by the theatre owner C. van Leeuwen. After he passed away, his neighbour professor Th. van Lidt de Jeude bought the area and started an amusement park, resembling Jardin de Tivoli in Paris (1795) and Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen (1843).6 The enterprise would flourish around the turn of the century under the management of Abraham Johannes Aspoel. Park Tivoli remained a district of exposition and entertainment until 1929 (“De tuin van Tivoli”, 1929). After its closure and demolition the branches of amusement – including music, opera, theatre, dance and film – were scattered over the town.

Another development is related to the boom of cycling during the late 19th century. Especially in the period from 1880 until 1896, cycling was

5 In London a comparable development occurred in the district Westminster. Just like the Maliebaan, the street name Pall Mall refers to the game of paille maille, played at those grounds in the 17th century. The small coffee houses along the lane were subsequently turned into clubhouses.
6 These amusement parks were named after the famous Tivoli near Rome (Heurneman & Van Santen, 2007).
popular among wealthy young men. A British gentleman called Charles Bingham, who can be regarded as a cycling pioneer in Utrecht, founded the town’s first bicycle trading company, *Simplex*, in 1887 (Kruner, 2012). Four years earlier he contributed to the founding of the Dutch association for cyclists (*ANWB*), which had offices at *Maliebaan* number 83. By request of the forty-four members of this association – among them one woman – a path for the practice of vélocipède and the sport of cycle racing was constructed in 1885 on the western side of the avenue (Heurneman & Van Santen, 2007). Around 1895, bike riding was so popular among the upper class that several cycle schools were set up in Utrecht, all of them situated in the neighbourhood *Buiten Wittevrouwen*. The firm of Mr. J.J. Goettsch, opened on 11 July 1896 at the *Biltstraat*, was the first to come into operation. Only four months later Mr. A. Vestdijk started his *Eerste Utrechtsche Wielrijschool* at *Maliebaan* number 35. This firm was incorporated into the company of Goettsch, followed by a move to the address of its former rival. Meanwhile two more schools were started: the firm of Willem Gerth in Park Tivoli (1897) and the Simplex cycle school at *Biltstraat* number 23 (1898). After 1909 the cycle schools faded away. Cycling was further popularized and consequently lessons were no longer considered necessary. Two cycle schools were converted into automobile companies (Kruner, 2012).

The fact that cycling became commonplace, was not just relevant for the emergence and disappearance of specialized companies. This seemingly insignificant change in customs had further consequences for the built environment, in the sense that the streetscape was gradually adjusted. In the final section the notion of the ordinariness of landscape will be further elaborated, emphasizing the importance of everyday practices.

**Iconography of the Landscape: A Dynamic Picture**

Until now, the emphasis has been on the development process of the neighbourhood, linking the fragmentary growth of the urban fabric during the period 1850-1900 to evolving spatial practices and their social context. This third section explores some aspects of the mental dimension of landscape.

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7 The *Nederlandsche Bond voor Vélocipèdisten* was renamed in 1885 as the *Algemeene Nederlandsche Wielrijders Bond* (*ANWB*).

8 The name literally means ‘Firstly founded cycling school of Utrecht’. Actually, being the second company that was founded, this name seems to be incorrect.
The dynamics in symbolic representation will be elucidated by briefly reviewing the adaptation of the political meaning of the *Maliebaan*. The history of the lane as a contested landscape is outlined on the basis of a few prominent moments in time. As a counterpart, the second example focuses on more mundane ideas and feelings, by considering the expression of nostalgia in the urban landscape. With the focus on its volatile and superficial character, this example forms an introduction to the final section of this chapter, containing a plea to put into perspective the importance of identity and meaning, and to concentrate instead on the importance of daily practices and routines. By reviewing the development process of the neighbourhood from the perspective of personal conduct, the role of participation and performance for the perpetual becoming of spatial order is stressed.

**Boulevard of Social Standing and Power**

Throughout the centuries, many renowned foreigners who visited Utrecht recorded their impressions. In the 18th century, a couple of French intellectuals were filled with admiration for the *Maliebaan*, which in those days was a unique urban phenomenon. Writers and philosophers like Diderot, Marquis de Sade and De Monconys considered the stately lane as an exceptional expression of culture. The philosopher and jurist Montesquieu visited Utrecht in 1729 and praised the Maliebaan as ‘*au-dessus de tout art*’, literally ‘elevated above all art’ (Bulhof, 1993).

Apart from the status as a work of beauty, the lane’s history is connected to its political meaning. After the capitulation of Utrecht in 1672 to the French army, the town was visited by Louis XIV. The lane made a deep impression on the Sun King, who according to oral tradition gave the order to move the trees of the lane to Versailles. In view of the political circumstances of the time, Louis XIV probably wanted to make a symbolic statement. Although his plan was never carried out, the quartered French garrison caused great damage by burning the woodwork of summer houses along the lane (Heurneman & Van Santen, 2007). The arrival of Napoleon more than a century later resulted in the loss of the original function of the lane as a mall. On 7 October 1811, the French emperor took the salute of 25,000 soldiers. For this event the central track was paved, while the fences along the lane were removed (Heurneman & Van Santen, 2007).

Not only the association of the *Maliebaan* as a boulevard of power, but also the dynamic relationship of this more or less permanent meaning
with changing social circumstances is illustrated by an event that took place in the second quarter of the 20th century. In 1937 the headquarters of the National-Socialist Movement (NSB) moved to the address Maliebaan number 35-37 (Buitelaar, 2008). The headquarters of this political party, which collaborated with the German regime during the Second World War, was expanded by the acquisition of adjacent buildings. The establishment of several Nazi offices once more emphasized the reputation of the Maliebaan as a boulevard of power. Besides, several parades were held on the boulevard by the National-Socialist Movement before and during the war. For instance, a grand march-past was organized in 1941 for the occasion of the birthday of its leader Anton Mussert (figure 12.6).

On 7 May 1945, Utrecht was liberated by British and Canadian troops. Only two weeks afterwards, the Maliebaan was the scene of an episode that would rehabilitate the lane. Prince Bernard of the Netherlands paid a visit to the headquarters of the Dutch internal military services (Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten), located at Maliebaan number 15. The prince drove his car down the avenue, passing a cheering crowd. One could say by this act the lane was symbolically returned to the citizens of Utrecht.
Progress and Nostalgia

On the released land of Park Tivoli premises were built in 1930, including shops, residences and the office of the insurance company *De Nederlanden van 1845*. The development was part of a process of city formation in Utrecht. On the authority of the municipality, the *Nachtegaalstraat* was broadened because of increased traffic and upgraded to a multifunctional street (‘*Onteigening te Utrecht*’, 1910). The new premises at the corner of the *Nachtegaalstraat* and *Wittevrouwensingel* were built in an expressionistic architectural style (figure 12.7). The building plan suggests that the architects in charge – the brothers Van Gendt – took some advice from the famous Dutch architect H.P. Berlage (Van Oudheusden, 1990). In 1936 the building, par excellence a product of modernity, was transformed in a way that finely represents the ambivalent attitude towards past and present (figure 12.8). On the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the university the facade was temporally reconstructed into a medieval fortress, with battlements, turrets and heraldically painted shutters (‘*Het derde Eeuwfeest Utrechtsche Universiteit*’, 1936). With this 'hypothetic landscape', created with the help of décor, the insurance company went along with the
Figure 12.8  The romantic décor in 1936 evoking nostalgia

Source: Het Utrechts Archief, catalogue number 4557
nostalgic sentiments of the population. A peculiar thing about this staging is the inversion of both time and space. Precisely on the place that for ages was situated just outside the confines of the city, a provisional historical townscape was simulated.

The Ordinariness of Landscape and the Importance of Everyday Practices

As already mentioned, landscape is a reflection of a spatial order. Figure 12.9 captures the idea that in addition to the transformation of the physical environment, the biography of a landscape is related to the active involvement of people with their surroundings (De Certeau, 1984). This photo compilation shows the location of the former Catholic girls’ school along the Adriaanstraat. Except for the removal of a fence and the reshaping of public space, in general the built environment has barely changed. Time is tangible in the use of the built environment, as related to everyday practices of people. It is not only direct interventions in the designation and design

9 The term ‘hypothetic landscape’ derives from the dissertation ‘De moderne historische stad’ (The modern historic city) of architectural historian and architect Paul Meurs (2010) and indicates the non-destructive manipulation of historical townscapes.

Figure 12.9  Compilation of two photographs from around 1900 and 2010, showing the location of the former Catholic girls’ school along the Adriaanstraat

Source: Het Utrechts Archief, catalogue number 3733, adapted by John de Jong
that contribute to the development process of landscape, but also the gradual modification of everyday practices. The relevance of ordinary human conduct for the perpetual conversion of the physical environment into a lived space is for instance underlined by the presence of bicycles and cars in the streetscape. As mentioned above, cycling was further popularized from 1900 onwards. It was not until the second half of the 20th century that driving a car was common. The bicycle stand (left in the photograph) and parking spaces demonstrate that through the years the public space was adapted to these customs.

The idea of spatial order has yet further implications for our conception of landscape. Following from the argument that space is socially reproduced (Shield, 1998) landscape can be defined as both the temporary outcome of past practices and the object of future practices in an ongoing process of ‘transforming production’ (De Jong, 2010). Personal performance is the propulsion of this process, generating a constant synthesis between physical environment, spatial patterns of human activities, and varied visions and sentiments about space.

A first consequence of this way of thinking is that even though landscape in a material sense may seem permanent, the associated patterns of use are by definition internally dynamic. Apart from obvious moments of creating, the persistence of the arrangement and appearance of a landscape is thus connected to human activities supporting the existing situation. It is here that the concept of ‘structuration’, introduced by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984), is relevant. The structuration theory of Giddens focuses on the production and reproduction of social structures and systems. According to Giddens, both continuity and change of society are linked to an ongoing process, whereby social structures are both medium and outcome of day-to-day conduct of people (‘agency’). As geographer Allan Pred (1984) already elaborated in his notion of ‘place as a historically contingent process’, the fact that social practices are both performed in and constitutive for an institutional context has implications for the development process of landscape. To put it concisely, the reproduction of social structures through localized practices is, according to Pred, a vital condition for the continuity of landscape. The biography of Buiten Wittevrouwen confirms this point of view. The described invariability of the spatial order in the period prior to the urban development was maintained by repetitive practices, for the most part trivial of genre. Farmers working their land, travellers and traders passing through via the Biltstraat, professors driving a boxwood ball along the course of the mall by swinging with their mallets.
A second consequence related to the notion of transforming production is connected with the openness of the development process of landscape. As Kolen et al. (2010) already argued, our environment is constantly given structure and meaning by social practices performed by people in day-to-day life. By referring to the concept of ‘embodied space’, and pointing to the parable between Giddens’ ‘agency’ and the idea of ‘ordinary practitioners’ as put forth by De Certeau (1984), Kolen et al. underline the bottom-up nature of the continual reconfiguration of spatial order. This implies transformation is not always heralded by manifest shifts in the institutional setting. Neither is it inevitably a response from outside or unpredictable events, nor exclusively the outcome of grand-scale interventions. Transformation also occurs gradually, as a result of evolving routine acts and the voluntary introduction of new customs. So in the long term, the same practices underlying the continuity of landscape contribute little by little to its development. In other words, transforming production means spatial order is never exactly reproduced.

A third implication is that not only substantial spatial interventions count. For example, practices in which landscape merely acts as a stage may eventually have an effect on the reshaping of the physical environment. In this respect the description of the way in which altering modes of leisure have left marks on the urban fabric of Buiten Wittevrouwen is typical. Transformation meant a piecemeal adaption of the landscape, following collective fashions and personal taste. It could even be stated that space is primarily a commodity to accomplish non-spatial goals and that all spatial practices are intrinsically intertwined with social, economic or political practices. As was clearly shown in the case of Buiten Wittevrouwen, speculative building had a profound impact on the realization of the neighbourhood. The organic development was driven by people who tried to make a living and acted according to dominant economic principles. The building activities were the outcome of manifold interactions between land-owners, speculators, contractors, bosses and craftsmen, each of them participating in the development to provide for day-to-day needs. Still today, the urban fabric carries the signature of late 19th-century liberalism, with small-scale and multiform construction reflecting a fragmented and incremental development process.

This brings me to the fourth and final observation, regarding the role of mental aspects. In line with the previous idea of derivative transformation, and given that acts in our daily life are to a fair degree performed from experience and based on intuition (Ingold, 2000), it seems sensible to question the intentionality of practices shaping the landscape. Of course it is already commonly accepted that landscape is never the exclusive result of
well-thought-out plans based on rational choices. However, the conception of landscape being gradually transformed by everyday practices in a perpetual process of social reproduction of space demands an appreciation of the imprint of personal participation and performance. Sheer coincidence, unintentional effects of conduct and even thoughtless behaviour have an effect on the development process of landscape. As becomes evident from the case, the maintenance and transmission of existing landscape elements due to a consciousness about its meaning – as often emphasized in discussions about heritage and landscape biography – should be put into perspective. Instead, more attention should be given to simple considerations concerning practical use. The persistence of field limits, for instance, was merely a by-product of dominant spatial practices. In fact, the composition of the neighbourhood – not only the spatial arrangement but also its social gradient – is more an embroidery than an expression of intended design.

By stressing the importance of participation and performance – even though often indirectly – the perceptions, attitudes, values and emotions of ordinary people are brought to the fore. A few examples discussed in the case of Buiten Wittevrouwen touch upon these mental aspects, though it is impossible to interpret the actual nature of these past performances from the outside. For instance, the bequest of Mrs. Speyaert van Woerden could be explained as an expression of disposition, but also as a personal longing to contribute to society out of charity grounded in faith. The same goes for the provisional conversion of the office along the Nachtegaalstraat into castle-like scenery. Apart from the fact that the décor was designed in honour of the town’s university, the momentary expression itself probably had nothing to do with a deeply felt awareness of local identity, but rather with superficial feelings about nostalgia and space of time. On this point a parallel between décor and permanent constructions is not inconceivable.10

Up until now the intentionality of spatial practices has been underexposed in discussions about the biographical approach. Supplementary to the focus on meaning, representation and identity in landscape research, a re-introduction of ordinariness as a theme implicates a descending to basal behaviour and sensations in everyday life.

10 From a perspective that takes the development process of landscape as a starting point, it could even be asserted that the attention for architectural style is sometimes over-estimated, while countless buildings are not so much comprehensively designed, but rather certain features are selectively copied after the latest fashion.
Conclusion

Each landscape is connected to a multiplicity of personal life stories. To reconstruct a detailed landscape biography is therefore a tremendous chore, not to say an impossible one. A kaleidoscopic perspective accepts this restriction. By linking the general spatial development to both its contemporary social context and single examples of human conduct, it attempts to grasp not only a consistent picture, but also the peculiarities of a landscape’s history. This perspective is especially appropriate to comprehend the process of landscape development itself.

By means of an analysis of the development of the neighbourhood *Buiten Wittevrouwen*, some basic assumptions regarding spatial transformations were explored that are also applicable to other types of landscape. A first observation was that the invariability of a landscape as well as the occasion for its change are connected with the continuity and dynamics of a wider social order. By looking closer at the development, it was argued that the urban fabric of the neighbourhood was produced in a more or less organic process by a collection of actors operating in a contextual and gradually changing framework of shared values and attitudes, existing spatial practices and formalized institutional structures. This finding underlines the significance of an awareness in landscape research of time-specific social rules governing human behaviour, for instance by taking into account the impact of legal conditions on land-use decisions, but also the specific personal motives for opening up new horizons.

Pertinent to biography of landscape is the idea of transforming production. To understand the gradualness of the process of landscape development, it is insufficient to examine only the manifest changes of the physical environment. Nor is a complete picture obtained by exploring only spatial practices. An adequate interpretation equally has an eye for ordinary behaviour and mental aspects. Since transformations derive from underlying changes in human activities and the other way round, people respond to changes in their environment, it is vital to consider the contemporary spatial order. This means applying a coherent approach of space, taking into account simultaneously spatial design, spatial patterns of human behaviour and activities, as well as the blend of ideas, meanings, perceptions, attitudes and emotions about space. Due to a constant interaction of those three dimensions, spatial order is intrinsically dynamic. Because spatial order is socially reproduced through time, temporality is a significant theme in the biographical approach of landscapes.
A final observation bears on the intentionality of spatial practices. As the shaping of landscapes is often highly connected to practical use, and furthermore voluntary transformation and transmitting both occur under the influence of everyday practices in a perpetual process of social reproduction of space, it seems sensible to supplement the dominant focus on meaning, representation and identity in landscape research and heritage studies by a renewed attention to ordinariness and a revelation of the impact of human participation and performance.

About the Author

After his graduation at the department of Social Geography and Spatial Planning at Utrecht University, John de Jong has worked for several years in the field of heritage planning. At the same time he finished his second MA, in Heritage Studies, at VU University Amsterdam. His research interest concerns sociological and geographical perspectives on heritage and cultural landscape.

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