

Flaneur/Flaneuse's Home and Articulation in the Netherlands

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Abstract: This article focuses on the experience of walking, cycling, the emotional experience of mobility and (in)visibility in urban space in rhizomatic urban spaces in different cities in the Netherlands by an architect flaneur/flaneuse, presented in an autoethnographic interpretation. The flaneur/flaneuse interprets the urban narrative and lived space through direct encounters and experimentation with everyday practices. This subjective experience leads to questions on the kinds of articulation that rhizomatic cities and architecture weave for the flaneur/flaneuse and architecture. How does a contemporary flaneur/flaneuse locate him/her being in an urban space in this era? Can a flaneur/flaneuse, today, set down roots in a home environment emotionally? How does contemporary architecture embed its dwellers or temporary perceivers in this era? As in Rilke's experience of a single lighted house, mentioned by Bachelard, are we confronting more solitary houses in urban space that remind us of our isolatedness and separatedness as a contemporary flaneur/flaneuse? Where does the warmth of the house/home start, when we have already started living in a world of "designed" narratives of housing policies? Therefore, the research highlights the experimentality of Dutch architecture based on the author's personal experience with urbanism in Utrecht, Rotterdam, Delft, and Amsterdam.

Keywords: autoethnography, flaneur/flaneuse, rhizomatic city, urban space, Dutch architecture

INTRODUCTION

"The city is an understanding of itself. To make it work, to make it operate, to make it liveable, all manner of ideologies, schema, concepts and images are required. Mathematical models, city maps, sign systems, poetic descriptions, painterly and photographic representations, architectural drawings – all these things and many more are the codes by which we consciously struggle to comprehend the city" (Miles, Hall and Borden 2000, 2). This excerpt describes how

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we are trying to perceive both our modern life and properly planned urban architecture. The elements and objects of this city engage and embed us through its events, happenings, and feelings. But where does the reality of the perceived urban space start, and what is its difference for a postmodern flaneur/flaneuse? Lived experiences form how we engage with our environment and how we articulate to our surroundings in a city. But how does it affect the articulation of a flaneur/flaneuse or a dweller to their home environment and, through this, to the city? Does a flaneur/flaneuse even need to articulate the postmodern city of today or is the home environment of today, a space of nowhere, an excluded geography? This article seeks to understand the reasons for these questions through an autoethnographic approach.

METHODOLOGY

“The city - as experience, environment, concept - is constructed by means of multiple contrasts: natural, unnatural; monolithic, fragmented; secret, public; pitiless, enveloping; rich, poor; sublime, beautiful. Behind all these lies the ultimate and major contrast: male, female; culture, nature; city, country” (Wilson 1992, 8). Roland Barthes (1981, 96) said “the city is the place of our meeting with the other”. Urban space has been a place of the flows of communication and change through the mobility of people. “Space is neither a mere “frame”, after the fashion of the frame of a painting, nor a form or container of a virtually neutral kind, designed simply to receive whatever is poured into it” (Lefebvre 1991, 93-94). Lefebvre further stated, “Space is a social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure” (Ibid, 94). Urban space is a stage of movements, perception, and memory driven by the forces of globalisation; it directs and integrates human articulation to the city. Urban space is a place for encountering the “other” and relates to “the presence of otherness” (Sennett 1990, 123).

Departing from the complexity of urban life while encountering the same, this work focuses on being an architect flaneur/flaneuse in different cities and places in the Netherlands. It adopts an autoethnographic interpretation of urban narratives and lived space through direct encounters and experimentation with daily practices. Autoethnography is held as a narrative in the form of short expressions on the everyday experience of the built environment and its relationship with social space. It then analyses “personal experience

(auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)", which is described as "both process and product" (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011, 273).

The experience of being a flaneur/flaneuse is realized mainly by walking, which is described as "mapping with" one's "feet", enabling one "piece a city together, connecting up neighbourhoods that might otherwise have remained discrete entities, different planets bound to each other, sustained yet remote" (Elkin 2017, 48). As Elkin mentions walking experience helps her "feel at home" (Ibid.).

FLANEUR/FLANEUSE AS A RE-READING URBAN SPACE

"The flâneur's whole body is a perceptive surface which lets things in" (Murail 2017, 169). In the twenty-first century, as cities are growing larger and more complex, and as societies are becoming multicultural, urban space is witnessing fragmentation related to postmodern structuration (Lefebvre 1991; Harvey 1990). The impacts of globalisation have connected cities through information, technology, communication, and transport technologies (Madanipour 2006, 175) and have created a placelessness in which humans negotiate their existence within cities. The contradictions of this new global urban life are firstly narrated through the signs, mobility, graphic language, expressions, relations between buildings, voids, and space of the urban realm. Flanering in these new geographies demands a form of alertness to the cultural, social, and political changes. Therefore, the flaneur/flaneuse is not alone in the streets, but is subject to the changes and transformation that cities narrate.

In modernity, the flaneur/flaneuse was defined as a hero of modernity and a "passionate spectator" (Baudelaire 1964, 9). This individual had an active and detached role, participating and rediscovering the city's nature and capturing the "other", the experience of which ended up with knowledge, according to Walter Benjamin. The flaneur, who came before his counterpart, the flaneuse, and his city shared a symbiotic relationship, where each was redefined and re-experienced through endless encounters (Young 2005). As Benjamin (cited in White 2016) explained, "The flaneur is in search of experience, not knowledge. Most experience ends up interpreted – and replaced by – knowledge, but for the flaneur the experience remains somehow pure, useless, raw". The Baudelairean flaner and the "psychogeography" and the strolling experience were defined as "dérive", or "drift" and became a "detached observation" as "a critique

of post-war urbanism” as mentioned by the Situationists (Elkin 2017, 42-43).

In the contemporary era, Baudelaire and Benjamin’s romantic flaneur has morphed into the context of a different relation. He has evolved to and involved the contemporary flaneuse in reconfiguring urban experiences, through their interaction in the crowd under the conditions of globalisation. The complexity and fragmentation of urban life enables the present-day flaneur/flaneuse to embed in urban events and the built space. Their aimless wandering in the romantic ideal, their “power as the other”, has become the realm of the unreal in complex space owing to dynamic social relations. In the contemporary era, the flaneur/flaneuse is amazed by the diversity of architecture and the emotions derived from encountering spaces. Conversely to this, however, Janet Wolff (cited in Pollock 1998, 77) has argued,

There is no female equivalent of the quintessential masculine figure, the flaneur; there is not and could not be a female flaneuse. Women did not enjoy the freedom of incognito in the crowd. They were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinise or watch. As the Baudelairean text goes on to show, women do not look. They are positioned as the *object* of the flaneur’s gaze.

The present work uses “flaneuse” purely in terms of flanerie, not from a feminist perspective. Flaneuse is employed simply as an equivalent of flaneur, a female artist and observer of contemporary architecture. The contemporary flaneur/flaneuse rediscovers the metaphors of a modern cityscape, which is transformed into a landscape of screens through the iconic façade of the digital age to be more of a placeless topography and architecture. His/her experience of urban space is limited to their obstacles and limitations to the sphere of activity: security cameras. The contemporary flaneur/flaneuse does not need to be everywhere. He/she is followed by the camera’s eye, and his/her connectedness is shared by the world, a web of interaction (Young 2005) since the postmodern city of today has become a digital landscape or a theatre set and the spaces of insecurity, control, and power are interwoven with cameras or controlled with a remote.

Meanwhile, “as political, economic and cultural changes have given a new significance to cities, urban space is being reshaped to accommodate the new urban conditions” (Madanipour 2006, 191). In his writings (such as *Delirious New York*, 1994; *S,M,L,XL*), Rem

Koolhaas defined the socio-physical contradictions of the city as thresholds to new possibilities (Koolhaas 1994; Koolhaas, O.M.A. and Mau 1998). In the Dutch exemplar, where every piece of land is designed, this view engenders an order that striking but also a play and it depicts a tectonic approach with an emphasis of hybridisation. In the complex urban narratives of today's metropolitan cities, the rhizomatic web of urban structures and the physical and digital realms of urban fragments shape and motivate a different flaneur/flaneuse, who is both attached and detached to urban life. Being detached from the environment, the flaneur/flaneuse confronts a generic urbanism, or a fragmented set of events through mobility.

What kind of articulations do rhizomatic cities, such as Amsterdam, and architecture have in weaving anonymous webs between urban space and people? Therefore, this work focuses on mobility, addressing (in)visibility in urban space which I experienced being an architect flaneur/flaneuse in Utrecht, Rotterdam, Delft, and Amsterdam, where part of my PhD thesis research was conducted. The diary-like experiences, which jump from one event to another, display a continuous but fragmented and thus rhizomatic approach as the city itself.

FLANERIE IN THE NETHERLANDS

“The city, our great modern form, is soft, amenable to a dazzling and libidinous variety of lives, dreams, interpretations. But the very plastic qualities which make the city the great liberator of human identity also cause it to be especially vulnerable to psychosis and totalitarian nightmare”, observes Jonathan Raban (1974, 8).

My journey began with a cluster of events taking place in urban space, from 17th century canal houses to haunted streets. I had decided to end my career in architectural practice to finalise part of my PhD research on housing in Amsterdam. In order to get know the city and live among its dwellers, on-site observation was the best way to contemplate and understand dwellers' minds. For this reason, I visited Amsterdam, particularly the Eastern Harbour District, in 2007 for a housing and site analysis. I decided to settle down close to the area on the southern banks of the IJ River. Despite my efforts, I could not find a location nearby the area. I had to travel around Amsterdam, usually by walking, biking, and taking public transport, and needed to revisit the district many times, approaching it according to the different experiences of other cities, after previously living in Rotterdam,

Utrecht, and Delft. Each experience affected one another and ultimately became embedded into each other.

As I lived these embedded events, housing became an object or tool of design, losing its sense of “reality” and becoming a trap that I could not escape. Instead, my bike became my temporary shelter, with which I could sense my territoriality like when encountering people as a flaneur/flaneuse. This sensation became similar to how Janez Strehovec describes the urban cycling experience in terms of de Certeau’s “distinction between strategies and tactics and his account of the pedestrian (walking) experience in the big city”:

Cyclists are the ones who will visit the city wounds (such as the site of a fire) and make them function as hidden spots of the city, because the understanding of the cityscape is enriched by the reading and re-reading of its dark voids and spots of indeterminacy... Each cyclist brings a novel story to the urban narrative (Strehovec 2010, 7).

In my cycling and walking experiences, each city presented me with vignettes of their characters. Amsterdam slipped from the shadow of its history, growing silently as a rhizomatic network of settlements. Rotterdam, as a city in transition with its hybrid culture, transformed or articulated my feeling of otherness as a flaneur/flaneuse into its dynamic streets. Den Hague drew the boundaries of the definition of “otherness” when the ombudsman talks to me about otherness. Finally, they all steered my perception of housing and urbanism to an understanding of the dynamics of urban space, as following some narratives with figures (photos by the author, 2007 & 2008):

31 October 2007

I settle down in a friend’s house in Krikenpitplein, Utrecht for a while. I feel like a foreigner in the modern two-storey student housing. This house is a courtyard-like settlement of dormitories, in which a sharp linear slit cuts the Lego-like building into sections and rooms. The slit divides the building into two parts, making two opposing spaces and lives along a narrow open-air corridor. In contrast to its narrowness, as a negative space and void the slit acts as a social meeting space during night-time. The design makes a sharp contrast with what is left outside as an artificial environment; it seems to be like a machine for producing social space and encounters with the others (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Split in the courtyard of the dormitory

Winter is felt in the humid streets, whose silence is broken by crunching bike wheels accompanying the babble of a group of walking schoolchildren. An endless drizzle creates a transparent effect over the city, making it a sharp and dark-light atmosphere. The large proportion of glass on façades makes everything seem unreal.

There is a movement in every part of the city. I go to a public library to email the landlord of the room in Delft I am about to rent. Within a few minutes of leaving my chair, I realise that my new computer has been stolen. I end up in a police station, reporting my stolen computer. At the police station, people gawk at each other, wondering what their reason is for being there, there is too much contrast between the inside and outside; a sharp silence inside that hints at the speed of what is moving outside.

The landlord calls me. When I say that I am at the police and ask him to wait, his tone of voice changes. He says that he wants me to pay a small amount of the money first.

2 November 2007

I go to Delft to meet the landlord of the room I hope to rent. My phone causes me trouble in the humid weather. I wait for the landlord for several hours in front of the church. I get up on a bench, holding a card with his name written on it for him to see me amid the tourist crowds in the freezing weather. He never comes. The address of the house he gave becomes fake in real life. The next day, the landlord's deep English voice turns out to be a different accent. I realise that he/she is a global scammer and like a remote control, this invisible person controls me through mobile cables, a virtual infrastructure in a global city that promises unpredictable encounters with others. I, a foreigner, am embedded in the virtual networks of this city. The police do not intend to report it. Between the virtual and real, the invisible and

visible merge into each other. I feel like an outsider, without any place to sleep. I plan to return to Utrecht, hopeless.

16 November 2007

At last, after 17 days I hopefully find an accommodation. Finally, after all this flanerie, both in real space and on the internet, I find a small room, where I feel I can feel at home. I go to a new city, Rotterdam, by train. I offer to rent F.'s, small room, which faces a small shed in the back yard. F.'s dog and cat welcome me. F. lends me his/her bike during my stay. I spend all my days on the bike, flanering across the districts of Rotterdam before adapting and being able to conduct my research. Later, rounds of seeing the built space and architecture make me feel safer than meeting with new people.

16 November 2007

Getting used to Rotterdam. On bike, I am looking for Koolhaas' early housing near a botanical garden. I find myself near the highway in the middle of the night, searching for his house under heavy rain. My map is all wet and unreadable. I get lost; there is no one outside. Suddenly, his house appears behind the bushes. While taking pictures of his house from the front, someone sees me from the upper floor, turning the lights on. Suddenly, I become visible in the dark. The light in the house creates a sharp contrast with the dark weather outside. I remember Rilke's similar experience of a solitary house, when he and his friends confront a "lighted casement of a distant hut" on a dark night. This single light, "seeing the night for the first time", isolates him from his friends. Bachelard (1994, 36-37) said, "We are hypnotized by solitude, hypnotized by the gaze of the solitary house; and the tie that binds us to it is so strong that we begin to dream of nothing but a solitary house in the night". I confront this sharp difference between inside and outside in urban housing in many cities in the Netherlands. The lack of curtains intensifies this image.

17-19 November 2007

Finally, without any alternative, I move from Utrecht to Rotterdam after a wait of 20 days. As I bike through the city, it becomes more than pieces of architecture with diversity and difference; it turns into a contiguous narrative with disruptive routes. My journey gets fragmented with the unexpected events that happen every day. The landlord/landlady, F., does not let me cook at home during his/her presence because of his/her high level of privacy. F. is a social worker

in their late 40s, but seems to have little connection with the outside world. I can feel this through every detail of the house, which displays a deep, sharp silence surrounding the interior of the house. F. asks me to walk his/her dog. The dog barks all day. It has an electronic bark collar and I run out to avoid seeing it in pain. I begin to avoid staying at home and feel safer, biking and spend all day around the local and immigrant markets, where I can be mobile. People's hurrying at the market makes me feel at home (Figures 2, 3).



Figures 2, 3: A view towards the marketplace, Rotterdam. On a window in the Central Library, it writes: “Als dit Narvik was, zou ik beter kijken (If this was Narvik, I would look better) inspired by “Bij Loosdrecht” poem by K. Schippers (Gerard Stigter). In the poem it is originally: “If this was Ireland, I would look better”. The poem calls for a more attentive look and above all to meet the obvious as if it were something new and means that only when you are in another city in another country do you start looking better

22 November 2007

F. stares out the window, watching the outside world. F.'s cat looks lonely and bored. I cuddle it and F. seems to be unhappy about my cuddle. I later realise that I made a mistake by not asking permission to cuddle it. I hear the same thing from different people in Netherlands: “My cat does not come to foreigners.”

Searching for a replacement computer, I stand in front of a computer shop located near a housing area, waiting for it to open. The police pass by and caution me that I may interrupt the households of the houses if I wait longer. I glance at my reflection in the glass façade to see if there is something wrong with how I look but, through the well-glazed glass, I only recognise the superimposition of the computers inside the shop on my mountaineering jacket. The glass does not accept me; the reflection does not allow me to see myself but, instead, shows how well the windows look. I notice the security cameras a little above me. I remember Boutin's words: “By making sense of the

flaneur/flaneuse, we get a better feeling for social class, race and gender conventions, industrialisation and urbanisation, global travel and colonialism, private and public space, concepts of time and space” (Boutin 2012, 131).

I feel like a dislocated flaneur/flaneuse. I bike every day to go to Delft for library research so as not to see F., the lonely dog and cat, and their cold dark house. I run away from urban space reality and try to exist in exhibition halls and art galleries in the city, where I feel safe.

4 December 2007

I head to Den Hague to talk about the discrimination I face. Den Hague seems to be a planned and inviting open city. On the way, by the railway, small buildings and annexes, greenhouses, walls, and columns have graffiti – not the picturesque type but a kind of graphic typology, mostly framed in a border, like drawing a frame. Graffiti is a dynamic representation of the “other” in urban space design. It enables a space for constructing dialogue with the “other”, an urban practice but concentrated more on concepts than ideas, mainly displayed on the surfaces of infrastructure by the railway. From urban art and graffiti, it can be traced that there is speed, motion, and dynamism in historical Amsterdam, but the space of a hybrid culture in Rotterdam.

The ombudsman talks to me about foreigner policies, urban rights, and the act against discrimination in Dutch culture. His/her words visually overlaps with this urban graffiti.

7 December 2007

Everywhere becomes accessible by bike on this flat geography. The city becomes more fluid by bike flanering. I compare myself to the modern flaneur/flaneuse with his/her relation to the ground. I also experience wearing my shoes inside the house, although I am not much used to it. Constantly wearing shoes makes me more mobile and eager to go out. In this way, the house becomes more transparent in my strolling experience. On the other side, I feel the contradiction of the sensory experience in the smoothness and crooked streets of Delft’s and Amsterdam’s city centres, as well as in the sharpness of the streets of Rotterdam and Amsterdam’s Eastern Dockland Area through the wheels of my bike and my feet as a haptic experience.

Finally, I am going to Borneo-Sporenburg. Although I am only acquainted with this area through its images, I spot the area on the bus route. At first sight, it is a huge pile of embedded houses that become

more than mere arrangement or typologies, but that has a strong narrative and interplay with social and public space. I wonder if these modern houses have open playgrounds for children. Or are these different-coloured, and texture-rendered boxes playgrounds themselves? One of the glass balconies overlooking the IJ river reminds me of the metal cage balconies that were used in Europe for sunbathing children in the 1930s. Overlooking the canal, these balconies seem like a constrained cantilever to the façade, seeming to be one forced to enter this fragile structure. In this row of detached houses, privacy is provided by the flower pot in front of the window. However, in front of this modern reflective glass, they seem part of acting for the strong narrative. The rows of houses seem to have been programmed to be a part of a working factory or theatre stage, which at any time is about to produce a cultural or social facility (Figures 4, 5).



Figures 4, 5: Houses like a factory in Java Island

The art galleries in Loods 6 are like the engine room in a ship, where the live and working parts are located. Everyone is producing here: sewing, drawing, and working alongside actual steam coming from the canal boats in the background. I head back to Rotterdam. A friend of F. offers for me to stay in another house, also in the neighbourhood. I accept and move to their three-storey house, the first time I have experienced a three-dimensional Lego-like section house.

I always feel that, aside from light and material, the first thing I sense and render instinctively in an environment is the ground and its tactile quality, where I feel connected to and interact with the space that affects my pace of walking, defining my rhythm of walking. Secondly, I sense the ceiling, which allows my feelings and ideas to flow, giving me the freedom of “being in the world”. The stairs are steep, but I feel all these three levels like a single empty void (Figure 6).

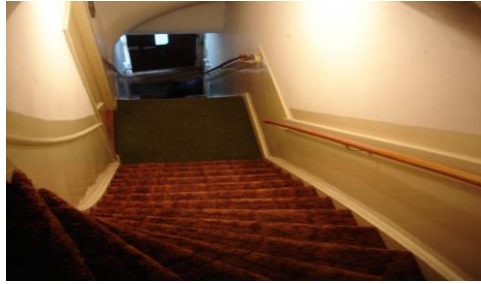


Figure 6: Feeling like fleeing in the house; section from the house, Rotterdam

This three-storey house has no heater and it is freezing; however, I feel at home and, in these 20 days, I can concentrate on my work. I feel the warmth of the house in this dusty interior. I think about the attachment of the flaneur/flaneuse to a house. As Benjamin (2003) once mentioned, “The street becomes a dwelling for the flaneur; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to the bourgeois in his living room”.

However, I avoid becoming attached to this home-like environment, knowing that I will leave it soon. Most experiences become transitory and fleeting owing to mobility.

10–20 December 2007

Amsterdam seems safer on this second visit. The city smells of ice and is so sharp and real through this fairy-tale housing area. Then fog invades and hides these famous buildings. Visibility is 20 metres. In the streets of Borneo-Sporenburg, I interview a person with a dog. The closeness of this periphery makes him/her feel safe. I try to understand the typology of the half-studio houses derived from needs. Still, no one is outside. Houses seem to be part of a working machine. Machine space, carrying traces from the harbour function. Palimpsest part of the city. It seems like a rhizomatic yet generic stage.

1 January 2008

Delft ... A dark, heavy city. Interiors are places of labyrinths of hidden history and home, like a nest to which one can escape. I recall Deleuze and Guattari’s interpretation as they define Amsterdam as a rhizomatic city with its stem-canals growing from a single root with different extensions. They suggest that Amsterdam is a city without roots,

“where utility connects with the greatest folly in relation to a commercial war machine” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 17). Can it apply to the interior of houses in Delft as well? The angles in the basement are flowing and glow with reflections. I feel a kind of subsidence on the ground because of the arches under the ground. Delft in winter becomes a haptic city that triggers my touch. I touch the city and its surfaces.

5 January 2008

Dinnertime at a restaurant, in a black polished-wood basement. I am at a long, thin table which brings people together with food, lots of magazines, and the restaurant's layout. A few hours later, the humming of people can be heard, involving the noises of the “others” (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Dinner space, Rotterdam

I have to return to my cell-like room in Rotterdam. It is freezing and F. closes the heater. A fragmented memory of interior space. Looking through the long window, the long gaze of the window is watching outside life like a television display.

I go to Amsterdam a few more times to make sketches and run analyses. The typology of the houses becomes more than a housing atlas. The “new transformative factors” in this contemporary housing narrate a kind of speed that articulates and embeds the spectator/flaneur/flaneuse. This is a narrated response of the housing to its perceiver. I stay at a hostel nearby, and the hostel gives insight into the area, a newly developed Vinex¹. The void in the hostel holds

¹ *Vinex (Vierde Nota Ruimtelijke Ordening Extra, Fourth Memorandum Spatial Planning Extra)* policies were released by the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment in the 1990s towards a more market-oriented approach in order to eliminate the injustice in housing prices by attracting wealthy households that deserted the city in the 1980s to higher-cost settlements and to ensure that

potential for being transformed or being adapted. The area brings to mind Ellin's quote of the postmodern city as a collage city, a city of montage or assemblage, replacing the functional city of modernism (Ellin 1999, 19). In Dutch architecture and design culture, urban space has become a flexible and experimental scene for transformation. Amsterdam, such as in the Eastern Dockland, seems to strength this relation of recalling the historical city centre. As a Vinex area, it was designed to increase housing quality, by providing unused areas for development and keeping middle-income groups within the city. As Boelhouwer noted, mixed-use housing enables "like-minded people to live together within a larger socio-economically and ethnically mixed district might help to build more integrated society" (Boelhouwer and Hoeskstra 2009, 13). There is a balance of sociality and, therefore, living with the "other".

15 January 2008

I prefer to stay in a different hostel in Amsterdam before leaving. The dark outside again makes a contrast with the light inside (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Light contrast between the interior and the outside. Inspired by Rimbaud, Bachelard (1994, 34-35) mentions: "The lamp in the window is the houses eye and, in the kingdom of the imagination, it is never lighted out-of-doors, but is enclosed light, which can only filter to the outside. ...By means of the light in that far-off house, the house sees, keeps vigil, vigilantly waits... Yes, there is someone in that house who is keeping watch, a man is working there while I dream away. He leads a dogged existence, whereas I am pursuing futile dreams. Through its light alone, the house becomes human. It sees like a man. It is an eye open to night".

Contemporary architecture is embedded in the city through different locations and it extends this rhizomatic network through its strong

existing cheap housing stock can be used by low-income residents (Van der Vlist and Rietveld 2002, 11).

design narrative and its meeting of the needs of a contemporary household. I leave Amsterdam.

FLANEUR/FLANEUSE'S HOME IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA
“‘un’-knowingness of the city may be the way in which the city works: there are many things that lie repressed below the city, away from our ‘knowledge’—and it is on these veiled, invisible, hidden, secret spaces that modern urban life rests” (Pile 2000, 266-267).

Steve Pile observed, “It is clear that spaces and places in the city are both known and unknown, both real and imagined—and they are known and unknown through the specific practices, discourses, and narratives that call them to mind, or bring them into (in)visibility” (Ibid, 274). Therefore, we can re-read housing and urban space through how it is advertised today in the media and on the internet, and through how people are attached to their environment in this temporary way. In my experience, finding a fake house through virtual networks and trying to locate it in the real urban space blurred the relationship between real and unreal, becoming a flaneur type of experience. Later, finding a real house again through the internet turned my housing experience into a sense of the generic urbanism of Rem Koolhaas (1998): like decor that can be taken out of context, or a city without a history. The generic city blurs the boundaries of visibility and invisibility. It is not rhizomatic but fractured.

Through this fragmented subjective experience of cities in the Netherlands, I ask: What kinds of articulation do rhizomatic cities and architecture have? Not every city I visited in the Netherlands is rhizomatic, but is it the link between the historical and the contemporary that strengthens the rhizomatic experience? How does the contemporary flaneur/flaneuse articulate the city, apart from becoming the “other”?

As Charles Baudelaire explained in *Le peintre de la vie moderne*, published in 1863, the flaneur is “at the centre of the world”, away from home but feels “oneself everywhere at home” (Baudelaire 1964, 9). However, the postmodern flaneur/flaneuse has encountered fragmentation in urban life. The cities of the twenty-first century have given rise to dissolution and fragmentation in urban life. The functional city of modernism has been replaced by a collage city: a city of montages or assemblages that has begun shrinking in an experiment with fragmented, other existences (Ellin 1999, 285). In the contemporary era, a city transforms its dwellers through everyday

practices, encounters with people and events. The urban cityscape, in this era, is confined to different narratives, thus creating senses of various spaces in a single city. Today, the impact of this new placelessness process of globalisation takes shape and unfolds in urban spaces and with the flaneur/flaneuse. Everywhere becomes the house of the flaneur/flaneuse but, at the same time, the flaneur/flaneuse is more detached from the “home” environment because of this fragmentation. Existing in such heterogeneous topographies and flourishing from the hybridity of cities becomes a fragmentary experience for both them and the dwellers.

In a way, the act of flandering can be defined as rhizomatic, as it is fragmented and fluid: it is not rooted. Heterogeneous cities can be called rhizomatic. Amsterdam is in constant change. A rhizomatic city is non-arborescent, non-linear, and has many surprises (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 17). Peripheries and Vinex neighbourhoods in Amsterdam seem to embed and extend the rhizome as an anti-structure by creating issues of mixed-use value and through engaging with the diversity of housing needs.

Mike Featherstone (1998, 910) mentioned the act of flandering as “a way of reading urban texts, a methodology for uncovering the traces of social meaning embedded in the layered fabric of the city”. The contemporary flaneur/flaneuse articulates the city through a fragmented narrative. The openness and responsiveness of contemporary architecture connote an open structure, with respect to diversity and equality for different income groups and social backgrounds (e.g. mixed house housing). Articulation refers to the attachment of the viewer to his/her environment. This attachment is realised at the physical, social, and imaginative levels. From a social, physical standpoint, the flaneur/flaneuse reads the signs and codes of the narrative in space and is parallel with it. From an imaginative level, the flaneur/flaneuse attaches to these codes in his/her mind and observes and becomes attuned to the genetic code of the city because of the narratives of spaces being open and easier to re-read. “The flaneur is not a person but a diagram of affections, a recorder of territorialities, combinations, variations and stratifications in the urban environment” (Brighenti 2010, 135).

The city is a site of visibility – a place for grand vistas, a spectacle machine and a surveillance apparatus. On the one hand, the city sells itself, its own images, logos and atmospheres competing with other

cities through branding strategies, urban events and architectural gigantism. On the other hand, it is a site for capillary surveillance, a complex apparatus that relentlessly makes itself and its inhabitants visible for governance and marketing purposes (Pavoni and Brighenti 2015, 5).

At the same time, invisibility is “generated socially, politically and technologically: the invisible is what constantly traverses and produces the city without being noticed and registered” (Ibid.).

Meanwhile, the contemporary flaneur/flaneuse is being followed by the camera or invaded by the quantity of the built environment. There is not a proper empty space left for it as the flaneur/flaneuse is blockaded by artificial landscapes. The flaneur/flaneuse is not rooted but is flexible. This flexibility is disrupted today by cameras or by the amount of overdesigned spaces that leave no other spaces for new modes of perception. Apart from the issue of the flaneur/flaneuse's mobility, new housing areas may display a form of generic urbanism in the eyes of the flaneur/flaneuse. Although many cities in the Netherlands are relatively sparsely populated by buildings, they still leave little space for the flaneur/flaneuse to exist.

Living with cultural diversity, uncertainty, and engagement with the “other” empowers creativity in an urban space. Experiencing the urban space in this sense means the construction of a view through interaction with a hybrid culture, flanering in urban space, and in art and architecture. However, rhizomatic cities and their relation to the city can enable a more open space and transgress this condition and in bridging the communication gaps, urban design and architecture can amalgamate diversities. As Elizabeth Wilson (1992, 9) mentions,

We need a radically new approach to the city. We will never solve the problems of living in cities until we welcome and maximise the freedom and autonomy they offer and make these available to all classes and groups. We must cease to perceive the city as a dangerous and disorderly zone from which women - and others - must be largely excluded for their own protection.

However, another question arises: Is the value of mixed-used narratives emphasized in today's housing policies, which empower inclusion of people still able to afford real houses, or in homes for the free wanderers who exist in real urban space? Today, where does the acceptance of the house/home start, when it does not leak into the outside? As in Rilke's experience, mentioned by Bachelard, are we

confronting more solitary houses in urban space that remind us of our isolatedness and separatedness? Is it possible to sustain such a relationship in the city, where we are becoming more transitory flaneurs/flaneuses, thinking of kitchenless houses (Puigjaner 2018) or zip cities (Scaletti 2016), the shifting spaces in future cities where people are more integrated into urban life, spending more time in the urban space and less in their home environment? In our homogeneous “becoming” cities, what if we all have to become flaneurs/flaneuses, living with estrangement while living in a world of mobility, flowing from one space to another? I leave the city with these questions in my mind.

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