I. Abstract

There is a great difference between the generated Dutch urban environment and the typical US urban environment. There are different attitudes toward self and community in the terms of ownership, usage, and behavior. Subsequently there are different attitudes toward place, street, block, city, region, and nation. The urban environment is situated in this scalar context and is informed by the people who conceive, construct, and use it. Furthermore an attitude toward community, the generated visible urban from, and attention to material detail manifest themselves into the seemingly singular form of street. Cross sections of the street reveal the layering of circulation, program, public space, private space, functional needs, as well as begin to speak to issues of materiality and use.

II. the issue of water and its past solution(s) as urban underpinning(s).

Binding Dutch life in the Netherlands is the issue water. The need to control water levels is a common situation to which the farmer(s), urban planner(s), and architect(s) must react. Their decisions and interventions on part of the system affect the whole system. This critical situation requires the collaboration of numerous people and in turn affects numerous urban planning elements. It follows that “architects and urban planners are still working with the basic building blocks of the Dutch city, which are defined by the underlying order of the irrigation ditches, meadows, dams, and connecting roads. They populate this order with expanded and distorted versions of the red-brick house with a sloping tile roof, curving, curling, unfolding and refolding it to enlarge its scale, [and] let its rigid form dissolve…” (Betsky, 2004: 212) In effect the urban designer is reacting to a situation set up by the farmer, the need to control water. The farmer’s solutions, and collaborative example, become the underpinnings for urban planning. Therefore they become something that the urban planner and architect have to react to. How this happens at an urban scale and material detail scale has been an area of exploration for Dutch planners.
The Netherlands: 
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III. a philosophy toward building

The modern history of Dutch planning is dominated by two main modes of thought. The first mode of thought is built around simple and non-complex geometries such as long linear boxes. The multiplicity and strategic placement of boxes create urban blocks for housing projects as well as industrial institutions. These blocks begin to form the urban environment through delineation of space which creates place. This causes the overall urban form to reflect ideas of mass production, rational design, as well as functional detail. The second mode of thought “calls for an integration of picturesque planning principles, traditional building systems [and materials], and human-scaled ornament to help alleviate the standardized appearance of new buildings.”(Betsky, 2004:36) The synthesis of these ideas in conjunction with circulation systems and the landscape becomes the urban environment.

This synthesis can be seen in the plan and development of Brandevoort. Situated above sea level, Brandevoort still utilizes the established design logic of strategic block placement, water management, and landscape integration into its planning. Furthermore it utilizes mass transit and circulation methods that help to inform the development of the town plan and street life. The result is a town with a human scale which can be experienced at the street level. The materials then come together to create a holistic yet subtly varied street view in terms of material selection, scale, type, function, and placement.

Synthesis of the nature is also prevalent in many newly developed places such as Almere Haven, Almere Stad, Almere Butien, Lelystad, and in existing areas such as Utrecht, Hilversum, and Amsterdam.
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IV. the life of the street: the issue of material and detail.

The philosophy and action of building creates place. Place reflects a spatial organization. “Spatial organization is a way of thinking about the reality one inhabits in a three dimensional abstract way. The concept was adapted from the German idea of the Raumplaung that sought to integrate the coordination of all physical resources in space.” (Betsky, 2004: 86) In this sense the Dutch are creating a spatial situation that they choose to occupy with density. By stacking units along a block with each block consisting of a certain building/construction typology and human scale they maximize the amount of people per hectar in a specific place while allowing for landscape integration, water management, and program development. The spatial integration incorporates scale, proportion, use, behavior and materiality; reflected perhaps most powerfully in the cross section of the street. The street is a reaction of past design decisions. Therefore embedded in the street is a rich tradition of building as well as a cultural reflection of use and behavior.

A typical generic Dutch street can first be described by its layers of function. The street is typically composed of buildings on either side of the street, layers of pedestrian circulation, layers of bike and car circulation, water, drainage, and trees or lamp posts. The heights of the buildings relate to the width of the street and create a comfortable human scaled space. The street at grade offers a public realm that requires participation by its inhabitants to be considered a living vibrant environment. Facilitating participation is commerce. Commerce in the form of shops, restaurants, bars, cafes, and grocery stores bring people to the street level. The width of the street and the number of people inhabiting the street can effect how busy or empty the street feels. (Herzberger, 2001: 49) This environment, the street, can be looked upon as an urban living room. (Hertzberger, 2001: 48) This comfort level of the living room is dependant on its layers of function and participation of people. It is also dependent on the number of cars impeding the ability of the street to be connected visually and physically across the street. The diagrams to the right (a-d) represent four iterations of street manifestation in four separate parts of the Netherlands. Each employs:

1. public program at the ground level
2. residential units above the public program
3. a certain scale of street (where x equals approx. 10 feet)
4. different layers and combinations of circulation (pedestrian, bike, car, parking)
5. different attitudes toward water

\[ \text{housing program} \quad \text{retail/public program} \]
The Netherlands:
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(a) typical street: Amsterdam

(b) typical street: Ijburg Streigereiland

(c) typical street: Utrecht

(d) typical street: Almere Stad
The Netherlands:
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(a) The typical street in Amsterdam yields a tightly compressed street life. The heights of the buildings on either side of the street remain mainly consistent across the city. The small street width contains circulation in the form of limited (in some areas) vehicular traffic, pedestrian traffic, and bicycle traffic. On the ground level the program generally consists of shops, bars and restaurants, and other forms of commerce. Above the public program of the street are 2-3 floors of living and/or rentable space. The masonry material of the building comes and meets the ground with similar yet consistent paving patterns. Generally the lower levels at the street have human scaled ornament and signage which aids in reducing the vertical scale of the street while dealing with the tight width of the street. The overall condition is one that begins to promote movement through the street and into and out of shops, bars, and restaurants. The width of the street hampers the ability of shops and restaurants to spill onto the street and utilize outdoor space within the profile of the street.

(b) The typical street in IJburg Streigereiland is one which reflects ownership and use. The program for the blocks are largely not social housing, but personal single and double family housing. The street in IJburg is wider then the typical street in Amsterdam and facilitates circulation in the form of vehicular (including surface parking) traffic, pedestrian traffic, and bicycle traffic. The street also includes landscaping in the form of strategically planted trees which reinforce the perspective of the street. The program at the ground level is a mix of private businesses and housing. The mix of elevation materials meet the ground at a consistent paving pattern which aids in the drainage of water away from the building and into a drainage system. The overall feel of the street is potentially empty or void given the lack of public program such as shops, bars, and restaurants. Aiding in this problem may be the width of the street, employed to facilitate the parking of seemingly stagnant automobiles, and the lack of bike traffic. Furthermore given the lack of public program the street may experience a flux of use which is largely dependant upon when people return from work and when the street becomes temporally active.
The Netherlands:
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(c) The typical street in Utrecht was not designed for automobile traffic, still the automobile has found a limited way to occupy the street. The program at the ground level in Utrecht is overwhelmingly composed of commerce in the form of shops, restaurants, and bars. Above the public program, similar to Amsterdam, is programmed housing and rentable living space. Unlike Amsterdam the shops, markets, and restaurants often spill onto the street and begin to cross the property boundary of the storefront and into the public profile of the street. Circulation is largely pedestrian and bicycle with limited amounts of vehicular traffic. The overall feel is that the street is full of life. Each street also has a different pace given the type of program that exists on the ground level in conjunction with the density of people within that space. The building heights are largely consistent around the city with exception being giving to monumental architecture such as the church. Bisecting the street in Utrecht is the canal which divides the street, but creates moments when crossing the canal becomes available. The materials of the elevations are largely masonry and the details of the buildings are similar in scale but different at the detail level. The materials meet the street at a largely consistant street material pallet.

d) The typical street in Almere Stad, depending upon the location, has taken its cues from the Streets of Amsterdam and Utrecht. The typical street in the urban development here encompasses many of the same programmatic elements at the ground level, but generally eliminates automobile traffic and parking from the street in an effort to cater to the pedestrian and bicycle. The scale of the street can then be compressed next to the canal, or next to another building which promotes commerce as seen in Amsterdam and Utrecht. Without the stagnant parked car or interruption of the moving automobile the street is allowed to be largely become occupied by pedestrians and bikes throughout the day. With living units above the public ground level the streets are also largely active throughout the day. The use of material here is also similar in nature to the attitudes of Amsterdam and Utrecht. Although at the ground level there are explorations with glazing types and signage the overall material attitude is consistent within the development of the block.
The Netherlands:
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V. Why the US urban environment is different.

When comparing the US urban environment to the urban environment of the Netherlands it must be pointed out that there doesn’t clearly exist a common binding element within the US similar to that of the Netherlands. While the problem of water management and limited land area affect every level of the Netherlands; the US on the other hand doesn’t clearly have one problem to unite itself around nor does it have a specific scale to react to. With the rising costs of fuel, and the type of fuel that the US largely consumes, energy could become the binding element that in the future unites the US around a single important issue. But the urban environment up until this point has not been developed around this type of model. The attitude toward property (ownership), space, and maintenance has greatly affected the way in which the US decides to build. That is: largely the built environment is constructed independently and without a coordinated and planned masterplan. While each developer contributes to the larger ‘whole’ the short and long term effects of the builder’s actions on that ‘whole’ are not examined prior to building. Thus there is a potential for problems such as urban decay and sub-urban expansion to compound on themselves until they officially becomes problematic and need to be dealt with. Furthermore existing urban underpinnings do not exist other then the arguably abstract and reductive Jeffersonian Grid that establishes spatial order.

New York City can be seen as an uncoordinated system that aligns itself to the Jeffersonian Grid. It now organizes itself in a reductive mode by submitting to the dominance of the personal automobile. At the street level it forces pedestrian traffic underground into the subway system while limiting the ability for bike traffic to effectively move about the city. Thus, the street has given itself to the automobile rather then to the pedestrian. The effects attitude over the street life of the city may facilitate the ‘speed’ of the street that happens today in New York City. Furthermore shops and restaurants may have large window displays and large amount of glass that address the street, but the actual program of those shops and restaurants begin inside the building envelope rather then with engagement to the street. The shops and restaurants have separated themselves from the life of the street and have receded and isolated themselves behind the boundary of the street profile.
The Netherlands:
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Unlike most cities in the Netherlands the scale of the buildings in New York City are overwhelmingly un-human. Architectural and design actions are taken in an effort to try and mitigate the scale through the use of parks, signage, and massing reveals at the street level. Still, the program of the buildings are largely uncoordinated as is the material of each building in relation to adjacent buildings. The effect is largely in line with Colin Rowe’s thoughts about the ‘Collage City.’ New York City can be seen as a largely illogical way of developing a modern city. The physical manifestation of New York City through the lack of overall planning and coordination leads to a fragmented city that doesn’t take its cues from historical context, but from modern abstract notions that potentially serve more singular purposes rather then integrated holistic and collaborative solutions.

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* Diagrams of Brandevoort:
http://www.brandevoort.com

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