

*May 7 Draft*

Mythologizing the Neighbourhood  
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Often the creation of a work starts while traveling. Traveling not only in the sense of visiting places I have never been before, but also traveling to places or situations I have been before. Who are the people I surround myself with and what keeps them busy? What are their interests and what do I share with them? I can create a dialogue between me and the other person with whatever it is that they are trying to contextualize or provide a visual output to the ideas that they were questioning.

It's very important to live by the idea that as a visual artist, I am also an activist. As a designer you have a big social responsibility. You can take any kind of information (maybe a fact, an opinion, a status) and either decide to be true and honest towards it, or manipulate it so that it takes on a form that you think serves it right. I am aware that to be able to reach out you have to understand how to announce yourself in the communicative field. With time and growth also come new discoveries of presenting works, this means that a possible outcome or project can be many different things. The many shapes a project can take seems to be limitless, and within this lies a lot of excitement and fun.

While comparing my latest works I notice that recurring elements in my work are social movements, city planning, the traveller, mapping thoughts, architectural structures, abandonment, virtual landscapes and rebuilding spaces. These themes come together in my graduation piece for Piet Zwart: "Monument for the Forgotten Person". This project deals with a big event that turned my neighbourhood upside down during my 2nd year at the Piet Zwart Institute. As a person was found to be lying dead in her apartment for at least 10 years questions were raised at how this could happen in such a bustling and social neighbourhood, where people of all ethnicities live next to each other and the streets are busy day and night.

In the 1958 second edition of the Situationist International Guy Debord wrote: “One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive*, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful–constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.”

In the Theory of the *Dérive*, Debord and fellow Situationists construct a new field of study: ‘Psychogeography’. Psychogeography explores how the geographic environment surrounding all humans, whether it is constructed by men or naturally made is effecting behavior and emotions within humans. What is interesting about some of their ideas that specifically apply to my practice and in particular the method of working in my graduation project is the “possible rendezvous”. In this method the subject (me) is invited by himself to go to a certain place (in this case, some street in Middelland) and, when there, is placed in a space with no–one to wait for. And I quote Debord again on this:

“He is freed from the bothersome obligations of the ordinary rendezvous since there is no one to wait for. But since this “possible rendezvous” has brought him without warning to a place he may or may not know, he observes his surroundings.”

In many cases this is how a work manifests itself. It is the exploration of a non–visited or before visited place. It is the moment of time where there is observation without restrictions. It creates an ideal space to encounter stories, instead of tracking them down.

Interactivity is often a key theme in the works that I have created. By documenting and describing existing scenery I will be ultimately re–inventing the space in a subjective way, therefore I can create a personal dialogue between myself and the viewer. When the subject of your work is the streets you are walking on, which seem to many as a vast and unbendable space, what will you decide to present? Famous examples of these “subjective maps” are the Situationist maps that were made in the 50s, and the legacy of their movement which resulted in millions of subjective maps that are still being made today. In 2010 I wrote the the-

sis “Atlas of Experience” which consisted of a collection of descriptions of these so called subjective maps. In this thesis I am arguing that there is no such thing as an objective map, and that the map itself is a very useful tool for self evaluation and creative practice. The map becomes the platform on which you can position your work and research. There is always a sense of personal decision making while creating a map (a map in it’s broadest sense). What I realize time and time again, and especially now while creating this final graduation work is the extreme beauty that lies within the uniqueness of every give space. If you would take time and devotion to carefully register what is actually around you, you will notice that no place is the same. However, if you zoom out, if you go on standby, then every town starts to look the same, and every city will remind you of the other.

Merlin Coverly writes in his book *Psychogeography* that “most of the psychogeographers now are still dealing with the same problems as have been dealt with before: the increasing banalisation of our urban environment and failures of urban governance. Urbanization of space, and especially the countless similar looking motorways and retail parks cause a certain kind of feeling (or non–feeling) within humans. JG Ballard calls this the “Death of Affect” in which a human loses all emotional engagement with his or her surroundings. The problem with our advanced technological landscapes is the bizarre behavior that they cause in us, making us go on standby mode while moving from point A to B. We can only be more conscious about being somewhere if we are surprised, intrigued or even slightly interested in where we are.

Simply by passing by and noticing in a careful manner the spaces you are moving in you are constructing for yourself an image of this place. This information is mediated to you through various kinds of sources presently being addressed to you or they have been revealed before. However the space itself in which you are physically moving at that time, is real. What is this pre-conceived image of your surroundings, and how does this affect your actions?

I moved away from Arnhem in 2011 and decided to live in Rotterdam. I was lucky as I had some friends living here already that could introduce me to the city and who I could live with; I didn't know anything about Rotterdam and its neighborhoods and the only visits I gave to the city were school trips to museums. In the town I grew up Rotterdam has a bad reputation; for its supposed difficulties with immigrants, high crime rate and that it has ugly and unlivable neighborhoods to name just a few. I would say that most of these are assumptions made based on 'not knowing'. I had these false ideas myself, and most of these remained even after moving there. But slowly, as I was spending more time on the streets and exploring the city, meeting its people I was constantly surprised by how wrong and prejudiced I really was.

I moved into Middelland, the neighborhood I am still living in. The text that I put here might remind you of your own move to an unknown neighborhood of a big city. It takes time to adjust yourself to your surroundings and to feel at home somewhere. I wonder where this feeling of 'being at home' comes from, is it your own house, the people you surround yourself with (friends, family) the streets you walk on everyday or does it have to do only with yourself. It must be a combination of all these elements. Can you feel at home everywhere?

The urge to be out on the street and registering what is around you is pure curiosity. It must be a human thing to know where you are and what happens around you. The brain memorizes quickly and effectively your environment. Soon, without fully realizing it yet, you have created a map in your own head of where what is, just like a cartographer drawing a certain area, you are also doing this without knowing it. What made living in a big city neighborhood so exciting for me is the ever-changing structures within a mind map like this. Although the grid is there, the encounters you experience traveling there are always different. Therefore, going out on the street can always be an adventure. And the registering, documenting of a space while walking through it is always full of surprises. As an example I would like to talk about a project that I did while working on my graduation piece



for the Piet Zwart Academy. One of my researches into the neighborhood involved taking several walks on it's streets. Every time the focus of these walks were directed on different elements, for example: architecture, social encounters, traffic (movement) or tourism to name a few things. By focusing on different elements every walk, even though it was the exact same route, it was always unique. Of course there is a difference between something as vast as architecture and as fluid as an encounter between two humans, but the idea is that with these walks I would be able to understand my surroundings better and create a more solid mind map of the space. What I realized while doing these walks is that I was doing something that normally happens without knowing, it is something we all take part in. However by forcing myself to look more carefully at where I am or what is happening around me I immediately started to feel more grounded as to where I was. Maybe the feeling of being grounded somewhere (or: to know where you are) is feeling at home.

Forming new ideas and starting a new project relies on the experience I have had with past projects. A new project is built while still dealing with the thoughts and concepts of a just finished project. Looking back on works I have done in later years, I identify a certain way of working and initiating projects. A work usually comes forth out of an exploration of the area visited (this can be exploring the place while actually being there), or exploring it by listening to stories or reading about it. Usually the mere visualization and translation of such an area can be a work in itself (objective journalism, documentation), but identifying the conflicts that happen within this area and commenting on them gives the work a personal and subjective layer, giving the work a critical dimension.

To have a clear image of what the space around you actually is and what it consists of is nearly impossible. It is a space that is constantly changing and re-inventing itself. However, through the use of archived material you can actually have a guess at who is situated here at a certain time and how the area is slowly changing. Through means of a walk an urban space can be carefully documented by recording and abstracting it's architecture and atmosphere.

Am Kotti is a five minute film that shows a 3d model of the Kottbusser Tor square in Kreuzberg, Berlin.

The model is build up using a collection of pictures taken on the square. The photographers are unknown in this model but all of the pictures are found on 4 different kind of online image galleries. These galleries are Flickr, Picasa, Panoramio and Wikimedia and their logo's appear on the picture where they were found. While the movie plays the camera rotates around the model and by doing so pictures appear and disappear because of the direction and angle they are facing. Because of the depth of the movie the overlaid images cover and reveal underlying pictures. Clusters of images can be found on several spots and also elevation is visible. A simplified map of the square including it's buildings and streets is the lowest layer on which the images are placed on. The film loops.' Although I had never been on this square before I was able to reconstruct it by carefully categorizing each picture and examining the buildings and places of interest in the background. The process of creating this model was more about collecting and archiving then it was about designing. The construction formed itself by creating rules about placement and visibility of the pictures. The model shows not only spatial appearance but also social structures.

For example: the Turkish community that resides in this area is visible, but also the touristic importance and drug-related problems can be found. The model is quite basic since only a moderate number of images are used. This is one of it's flaws, as I could imagine the model being a lot more efficient and better to read if even more images were used and placement was done scripted instead of being picked one by one and placed according to what I think should be the right spot. This also makes it not perfect: I might have made mistakes in the process and images could have been shuffled or not placed because it wasn't completely clear where the picture was taken. What is interesting about this way of handling image is that the pictures themselves become a spatial, they are no longer the flat images seen on the screen. When depth is seen not only within the picture, but also around it, and

to be able to compare with ‘neighboring’ pictures, they become part of something bigger. I understand that the real time location of the model is ever changing, this can make the model outdated quickly. One way to solve this problem would be to update the model regularly, re-organizing the archive of images and understanding what is happening in that area if you want to make it a tool that can not only show the change in space (new buildings, streets, bars, stores, nature, public transport etc.) but also the social issues that are present.

[Link to next passage: It’s peaceful in Spangen”](#)

How can previously read information greatly alter perceptions of a space when the actual visit is made. How a fantasy created image of a certain space still sips through reality.

In the 90s the neighbourhood of Spangen, Rotterdam was made a no-go area. It had the doubtful position of being the very first of it's kind. There were many problems with drug trafficking and the neighbourhood was in decay. Since then a lot has changed, the neighbourhood has slowly recovered and has since been an example of urban renewal and it's positive effects on society. I'm using the neighbourhood of Spangen to explain my theory of the fantasised space because it was discussed so many times in the news and most of the Dutch have heard about it one way or the other.

Even today Spangen is still victim of it's own history, the neighbourhood has a heavy stigma on it although the municipality of Rotterdam and Woonstad Rotterdam are trying hard to create a different image for the neighbourhood. Translated from the Woonstad Rotterdam Spangen webpage:

“It's peaceful in Spangen– The relevance of Urban Renewal”  
 Spangen today is characterized by it's pleasant and surprisingly peaceful living. During the turn of the century Spangen was exciting enough to devote a crime series to it. If there had not been an intervention during that time, Spangen would have been the worst neighbourhood by far in the Netherlands. But there were interventions, large-scale operations. What happened? Who did what? What were the goals? Were all of these reached?...”

Currently Spangen is still a topic of discussion, from it's renowned architecture, football club Sparta and it's constant flow of all kinds of different residents to it's rise and fall – and rise again. Unlike other neighbourhoods Spangen in particular has to constantly prove that it can also be safe, pleasant to live and overall enjoyable. One of Woonstad Rotterdam's video's about Spangen portrays a middle class white Dutch family that recently moved to Spangen, explaining why she

moved there and that she was even warned by friends about the neighbourhood. She was surprised at how pleasant it was there. Spangen is a fantasised space, constantly bugged by the fantasies surrounding it. Walking through Spangen as an outsider brings back memories of the images I saw on the news as a child: of sealed down drug houses and junkies walking the streets, these images are fueled by the information that I am finding about Spangen today. In the theory of the fantasised space Spangen has quite a problem: it has a great difficulty to lose its stigma of no-go neighbourhood.

On the other hand, an overly positive fantasised image is sometimes created. Tourist offices and their promotional work are an extreme example of this, usually depicting their travel destinations to be extremely beautiful, peaceful or positive in any other way. The traveler is invited to come see the spectacle for him or herself, but when actually there in person is disappointed by the real image of the environment. Recently a series of pictures appeared on the internet called "15 famous landmarks zoomed out" showing the often not so glorious surroundings in which for example the pyramids of Gizeh, Stonehenge, the Taj Mahal and the Niagara Falls are located.

Tuzla & Sarajevo is a publication consisting of 3 different pieces: 2 booklets showing images and 1 folded letter. The 3 pieces are put together to form the whole publication.

The contents of booklet 1 are different images in full colour. The images are depicting various architectural buildings and landscapes throughout Bosnia. Booklet 2 is placed in the middle-spread. The contents of this booklet are again images but shown in black and white. The images are placed in landscape format and on it ruined or abandoned buildings can be seen. The letter is folded in half and can be taken out. The letter addresses to a person and there is a text written about various encounters during the trip. The text is designed as an analog hypertext, where after certain words or sentences numbers are placed that are pointing towards the pictures found in Booklet 1.

This publication manifested itself while traveling to unknown territory. Although I had never been in these places before, I could follow with ease my friend who grew up in these areas. This gave me the perfect opportunity to not focus on direction but on my surroundings. Some weeks after the visit I tried to relive the journey. The thoughts I had while there still remained and the images I took were with me. In some way this book relates to the book "The Songlines" by Bruce Chatwin. The writer in this book describes a trip to Australia which he has taken for the purpose of researching the Aboriginal song. Not the subject matter is similar in these books, but the way stories and imagery are non-fictional and fictional, and how these fuse with each other to create a new story is present. For example, some of the passages that you would find in the Tuzla & Sarajevo book are not completely true, as they are constructed images based upon a memory.

There is something fascinating about following someone around and leaving the direction and flow of the walk completely in the hands of someone else. While being guided through an foreign area there is more time to register and decipher the situations and spaces you encounter. Soon enough small details you would normally not pay any attention to present themselves to you. It is a perfect situation for someone who holds a camera, as he is completely free to capture

anything he sees without having to worry about practical things like not getting lost or being somewhere on time. This feeling of visual freedom is especially exaggerated when you are unable to speak the language of the environment you are situated in, because you are not immediately distracted by words or sounds that sound familiar. It could explain why we are so eager to capture every moment we feel is important when we are traveling abroad.

**Continue text on registering and documenting**

Documenting and commenting on a place launches it into a new consciousness about it: the constructed image of a space in the head of a human. Will Self writes in an essay on Psychogeography: “Perhaps the best possible impact a film can have is to cause its viewers to regard the world around them with fresh eyes; watching this London film (Urban Wandering) in the very heart of London will, I feel sure, massively intensify such effects.”

My recent work is grounded in the neighbourhood of Middelland. I believe there should be a direct link between the work I am creating and the space it is documenting. When certain passages in a book are recognized by the reader, it makes the experience of fantasizing about that environment a different thing, because you have certain elements you can build this fantasy upon. This can be both negative and positive. For example: while reading a book that has been adapted into a feature film, and you have seen this before actually reading the book it will most certainly affect the construction of your fantasy. Of course: since the characters described in the book have all been cast as actors, it is impossible to see the two as separate. The same applies to news articles or other kinds of information (old or present news) about situations in countries, cities or other spaces you have never physically been in there yourself, thus greatly affecting how this is perceived when you are there. By means of a fictional story combined with non-fictional vast elements different values can be applied to existing things.

Let’s take Middellandplein as an example. I live in a house on the northeast corner of the square. While researching this square I came across a picture of Nazi German soldiers marching through the streets. The image was so striking as it transformed the present day square into something that holds a greater historical value. Since the square hasn’t changed much since the picture was taken the feeling of the marching soldiers can still be felt when you are there. Of course only with pre-knowledge about this event in 1940 can you reconstruct this, but it certainly altered my view of the square.



On the 17th of February 2014, during my final year at Piet Zwart I squatted the house on Middellandplein 1 with a group of enthusiasts. The moment I entered the building and looked upon Middellandplein from the exact opposite of the house I was living in at the moment changed my perspective of the square in a very literal sense.

[More in-depth about the squat](#)

[Comparison to Bep de Bruijn's house](#)

[Explaining "Monument for the Forgotten Person"](#)

