

# >> Amsterdam: Beyond Inside and Out

Faculty of Architecture  
Delft University of Technology  
Berlageweg 1  
2628 CR Delft  
spacelab@bk.tudelft.nl  
www.spacelab.tudelft.nl

## Stephen Read

### A connected city

Amsterdam grew as a trading city, connected to the world, infected with the accents and attitudes of faraway places and stimulated by the friction between the parochial and the exotic. At a time we sometimes imagine to have been firmly fixed in place; contained within walls, and between town hall and church spire - it already occupied a position at the intersection of networks of commerce extending way out into Europe and the rest of the world. Amsterdam in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a bustling center of dealing and bargaining: prosperous, expanding rapidly, regularly bursting through and remaking its outer walls. Its streets and quays were alive with an abrasive mix of merchants and shippers, shipbuilders and fishers, bankers and middlemen, rubbing shoulders with a motley collection of economic migrants, itinerants and refugees from less hard-headedly broad-minded attitudes and mores. This was no sleepy village; the foreigner and stranger was a commonplace in its streets and coffee shops. But at the same time Amsterdam was a city of citizens and of neighborhoods, inhabited by people linked by a sense of common identity and with a sense of belonging in its streets and squares.

In the eighteenth century Amsterdam experienced an extraordinary reversal. Like Rip Van Winkle, it fell asleep (at least as a significant continental and global player), and arrived at the end of the nineteenth century only just beginning to spill again out of its seventeenth-century walls. Dutch cities missed a great many of the changes experienced by other European centers as a result of the Industrial Revolution. In Amsterdam today there is no typical central business district; the concentration of power to the center experienced by Paris and London, for example, with their radial spreads of workers' and middle-class districts, happened in a much more limited way. Instead, the twentieth century arrived in a city just waking from a long winter of economic stagnation, with its seventeenth-century plan, its residential character, and even its architecture, rather shabby and threadbare but substantially intact. First the welfare state with its state-sponsored housing, and then infrastructure and the explosion of mobility with the drift to the periphery, were the shapers of the further expansion of the city. In between, in the second half of the twentieth century, Amsterdam, despite its small size and population, and despite (or perhaps because of) a paradoxical urban decline linked to global economics, played a central part in the emergence of a global urban culture. It was a center of the popular urban radicalism that emerged in the 1960s and it contributed the Provos, the Kabouters and the New Babylon to the story of the emergence of 'the urban' as a 'question'. It also generated a huge folklore around its involvement in the 'permissive', the hippie and pop cultures,<sup>1</sup> from which it still lives as a youth tourist destination today.

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Amsterdam itself remains very substantially a residential city; its politics to a very significant extent, even today, focused on the struggle to maintain the center as a liveable and (barely) affordable living environment.

### **Located in the networks**

The city occupies a strange position between the world 'out there' and the world in our heads.<sup>2</sup> Its materiality is incontestable, as is the way it presents itself as a visual scenery of types and styles of buildings, standing apart from and looking over the lived flux of the city and its processes. At the same time, however, this physical thing indexes and orders the world of our everyday actions and social interactions so pervasively that it is difficult to separate it from the lives we live and the structures we recognize as 'community' or 'society' or whatever. Beyond its material surfaces, beyond the object we stand apart from and observe, lies a city we understand rather more sensuously and immediately as an underpinning for something else. Here is a city we experience and recognize, like the background awareness we have of the positions of our limbs, through the shapes, sequences and rhythms of our actions and interactions, and the things we encounter in the course of those actions – through the way we *live* it and encounter others living it, and use it to make real and to order our everyday lived social experience.<sup>3</sup>

Amsterdam today is a city 'known' by many millions of people. Images of its streetscapes and even its plan are instantly recognizable across the world. It is the subject of countless travel books and documentaries, brochures and advertising features, a product for consumption in a world made accessible by airline travel and commercial tourism. But being there is something else, being there is about being *immersed* in a setting whose shape and atmosphere is itself an integral part of the structure and order (the 'habitus'<sup>4</sup> in Bourdieu's terms) of people's lives. The difference between the city of the traveler and that of the inhabitant goes way beyond simple issues of local knowledge and familiarity; it has to do with the different worlds and viewpoints they bring with them. It has to do with *perspective*. But these worlds are also not separate from each other, and they don't simply meet in the arrivals hall of the airport, or on the harbor-front of seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Rather, they intersect in dynamic patternings of space in the city, in the networks of streets and squares; conditioning, shading and coloring habitus and place, articulating relationships between differing worlds, differing perspectives on and commitments to the place. The space of the city itself is articulated into different levels and qualities of public-ness; identifying and structuring different orders and levels of significance, and of community and belonging.<sup>5</sup>

### **Other worlds**

*Negotiating a passage through the rabble of backpackers and other loiterers installed on the steps of the Albert Heijn food hall and supermarket, under the lumpy architecture of Het Paleis (the official royal domicile in Amsterdam). Dreadlocked and pierced, a young couple, speaking Italian, share the lunch they have just bought with the border collie at their feet.*

*Exit the mass by turning right down a side-street. Half a minute away and one enters another world; also 'Het Paleis', a neat but unprepossessing café, one of a small network, distributed through the center and nineteenth-century belt, of trendy meeting places for the city's bright and beautiful. Quiet and orderly after the throng in the next street, it is less than half full in the early afternoon of a sunny Saturday. A late-twenty-something with dyed jet-black hair sits over the newspapers and her address-book in the middle of the café making calls on her mobile phone. A long-haired man in well-cut jeans comes in from outside to meet his wife and two school-age children, who are drinking cappuccino and cola. He shows off the quality of the marijuana he has just bought in a coffee shop around the corner (this is Amsterdam!).*

*These are also travelers, many of them almost as familiar with the languages and the hangouts of London, Paris and Berlin as they are with those of Amsterdam. Here they are at home, their worlds shrunk again to the comfortable familiarity of the routes around their inner-city neighborhoods and their favorite haunts. Their space is woven into the tree-lined canals and straight narrow streets, behind and between those over-priced shopping and tourist spaces one step removed from the network of freeways, stations and airports that delivers the throng just 100 m away.*

Cities today still deal in the basic business of structure and articulation – shaping the worlds of stranger and inhabitant, local and larger scale interests – and the inhabitant and the stranger still embody two opposite polarities of dwelling in the city. While a great deal, from Bachelard<sup>6</sup> to De Cauter<sup>7</sup> has been written about the impossibility of any longer *dwelling* in the city, it is not my intention here to dwell on the ‘crisis’ highlighted by cultural philosophers. Designers deal with the issue at a different compass and with a different intent. They seek opportunities where commentators seek trends and make of them universals. Designers are happy to find niches where their craft can be exercised, and by close observation, we find countless ways the city still articulates the social and existential worlds of different urban populations, and the way it still, to a very large extent, supports the everyday real-life sociality of the urbanite. More of these niches may be uncovered, re-invigorated, perhaps re-invented once we understand better how this process works. We need to explore the poetics of today’s space, to point a way to re-engaging with a contemporary mechanics of urban dwelling. By finding out how dynamic urban populations are structured in space, and more importantly how their relationships and interfaces with each other are structured, we may discover that we still have it in our power to integrate and connect multiple layerings of social existence.

### **Absorbing change**

The number of ‘worlds’ we deal with in any city are more than multiple, they are multitudinous – split along all the well-known lines of division: ethnic, lifestyle, age-group, class, and so on. They are split also along ever-new lines that seem to multiply endlessly as the world changes around us. And yet the urban center seems somehow to absorb all of this: not without conflict and friction, but certainly in a way which is reflected and becomes legible on the face of the city itself – in the characters and conditions of its spaces and places, in their decayings and changings and in their surprising recoveries.

A real issue today, in relation to cities, is how so much of the stuff we associate with an urban community: the corner grocers and bakers, the traditional brown cafés, the amenities for a way of urban life familiar perhaps from the times we stayed over with our grandparents (and cast in the cozy, rosy hues of those memories), are changing or are disappearing seemingly from under our noses. In their places have emerged and are emerging other characters and amenities, generated by and targeted at a different, a more dispersed and mobile, a more worldly, less committed population. It is clear that something is changing – but it is not always so clear exactly what that is, and what we should do about it. It is nevertheless also apparent that the center in a very direct way accommodates these changes – it doesn’t simply provide space, but also seems to find a place for them.

### **Changing worlds**

*The workers’ district of the first half of the twentieth century, with its straight streets lined with almost identical white-trimmed and cheaply-built housing, its daily market, its brown cafés, small shops and smelly industries, had, by the time my neighbor moved there, become the volksbuurt (people’s neighborhood) with its culture of local engagement and annual rituals of rent-increase resistance and street beautification.*

**3** *There had been fewer chain stores along the Ferdinand Bolstraat, the local high street*

when, as a student, she had moved into a small squat in the side street she still lived in. Her window, which had then looked out on the back of the old brewery, gave out now on a new supermarket and new shops and restaurants which catered over weekends to crowds of younger people with money to spend.

The anonymous throng of shoppers on the high street gave way to a scattering of passers-by on her side street, each, by their presence and in a way she could read effortlessly, embodying the multiple stories of the buurt. Each of the half-decades she had been there had seen a new story begin. And each story had been layered over previous ones, so that none of them ever seemed really to end. The rather earnest left-bankish cafés of her time on the other side of the Ferdinand Bolstraat were still there, catering to many of the same people – older now and with jobs in design and the theatre or in the voluntary sector, and to a new generation of the people they had been – artistic types, readers and movie-viewers. The neighborhood had attracted ethnic minorities in the more recent past who brought with them cheap eateries and exotic shops and smells. It was now becoming the yuppie neighborhood, with its overpriced apartments, its sushi bar and its designer cafés.

The daily market is still there, along with a decent number of long-standing residents, who had resisted (or who could not afford) the drift to the suburbs. Their regular complaint, besides the way rents were going up, is of the transformation of the market from a place where one could buy daily provisions more cheaply than in the supermarket, to a place where teenagers buy €10 tank-tops, and tourists, whose space extends just this far out of the historic center, come to buy their Amsterdam souvenir T-shirts.

These changes are very largely a matter that runs ahead of a well-meaning planning bureaucracy. They are a matter of appropriation, the taking over of a place by new tendencies and new times. The idea of appropriation runs counter to many of our preconceptions about place. It appears to be a matter of openness rather than of fit, and insofar as multiple and overlapping appropriation seems possible, it seems to make a nonsense of the idea of social territories. Insofar as it happens opportunistically and repeatedly, by populations who often see in it nothing but a temporary refuge, but end up making of it a home and a place, it forces us to question the idea of collective memory, or where exactly this ‘memory’ may be located – in the (collective) head or in the space of the city itself.

For the planner or designer today, this is not in the first instance an issue of authenticity, as if place was a matter of scenery, of architecture made in an appropriate (or not) style or of serving any particular history. The processes taking place in the city today are delivering changes to urban centers, and the problem, rather than being one of making *fit* localities, seems to be becoming much more one of resisting contemporary tendencies for localities to disconnect from one another socially, to break up into separate territories and to disengage from a continuous urban experience. Design begins to be about giving back to the urban subject the opportunity to themselves construct complex meaningful realities out of their embeddedness in continuous connected urban fields.

#### **Process of place today: from civic enclosure to urbanized landscape**

The space of seventeenth-century Amsterdam was clearly contained in relation to its immediate surroundings. It was a world apart, defined against a hostile outside prone to devastating flooding, and by its walls. Contact with the outside proceeded above all through the harbor front. The inside had its dangers, but they were dangers domesticated by the fact of their being contained within a delimited social space. To venture outside the walls meant crossing a threshold – from a socially ordered inside into an unpredictable dangerous windswept outside. The predominant relations

across this landscape were with other enclosed entities, other cities that were partners and rivals in commerce and in struggles for political and economic influence.

The space of modern Amsterdam could hardly be more different. Amsterdam today, after the economic and urban decline of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is once again animated by tracteries of activity and movement at regional, continental and global scales. The harbor as point of contact with the wider world has been replaced, at the exact location of the center of the old harbor, by Central Station, which is connected not only to the region and to other national centers beyond the local network, but also to the high-speed train network connecting Brussels, Berlin, Paris, London and Milan. Other continental and global travelers stream into the city through Schiphol Airport. Amsterdam sits in the second rank of global cities, as part of the network of business and finance linking London, New York, Tokyo, Frankfurt and Paris.<sup>8</sup> Flows of information, people, and especially ideas and finance, leapfrog the region and even the nation to funnel wealth and power into and through the city along highly controlled conduits.

Without doubt, though, the factor that has the most significant larger-scale effect on the space of Amsterdam today, and the way it effects the character and experience of the city as a place or matrix of places, is the general increase in mobility of the modern urbanite. Where just half a century ago, the lives of the overwhelming majority of the city's population were bound up within the city, today the rush-hour traffic on the trains and the freeways, is as much between cities as within them. It is a commonplace for people to live in one urban center and to work in another, and people's social circles and their places of everyday business and entertainment spread themselves out in a network whose reach extends well beyond the old urban boundaries.

### **New social condensers**

*Spotting a colleague ahead of me, I pick up speed, overtaking him just as we reach the door of the train that will take us both to our work. The rest of the journey is spent swapping notes and catching up on the progress of a joint project.*

*Reflecting later in the day on the state of contemporary urbanity, it occurred to me that we had experienced another of those unremarked inversions of conventional wisdom that seem so to characterize the state of our urban lives. As a relatively new inhabitant of the inner-city neighborhood I call home, I cannot say I know a great many of my neighbors – nor does this seem to be a particularly unusual situation. It is only rarely that I bump into someone I know in those traditional urban condensers, the local high street or the neighborhood street. What's more, I don't experience this as a loss, nor feel that it diminishes the value of my neighborhood as the local support for the processes of my life. I inhabit simultaneously many spaces, many complexes of relations, and it is no longer obvious that the space of my most social and personal life will be the most local. Many – no, all – of these spaces I inhabit adhere to and merge with coherent movement or communications networks, and clearly this is where many new social condensers will be emerging – at urban, regional and even international nodes, as well of course as in telephonic and electronic space.*

*My local area with its buzz and variety, and with all the amenity that buzz and variety supports and attracts, becomes setting (more than that overloaded notion 'neighborhood'); a public extension to my private realm, an aspect of the identity I choose to project; not only, but also a decor to my life. Personal social neighborhood, in so far as it is possible to specify, exists in a far more complex and multiplex configuration of geographic, network and virtual space. The local setting is stillrich and deep with complexes of relations, but set up on the basis of an urban mechanics that is formed less around spaces and scales which relate immediately to my personal space and*

*experience, and more to generic processes of scale and movement related to systems of urban networks. These processes are still able to establish the conditions of overlap and social multiplicity and diversity that characterize those places we point to when we refer to the seductive pleasures of the urban experience. The urban place (even in the urban centre) is constructed in metropolitan and not in medieval space. Simmel's blasé individual still treads the pavements. Old-fashioned community is possible amongst children playing in the back-streets but is a silly fantasy for people who live their lives in metropolitan space.*

There is a new scale in the present-day urban spatial field led by the mobility of people – by the new dimensions of everyday human activity as these eclipse the physical limits of the old center. 'Outside' has disappeared from the old 'inside-outside' of urban center and periphery, and it is the scale and intensity of the flows within the new extended urban field that is redefining for us what urban space is, and forcing us to reconsider its nature, as well as reconsider our thought-habits of 'inside-outside' and 'edge-center'. But the new urban social-spatial scales and their effects don't limit themselves to the peripheries of old centers; centrality and peripherality seem increasingly to invade every sector of the urban landscape, weaving through each other, flipping old orders on their heads, establishing an often discordant space whose collisions and inversions have become an ever more familiar part of our lives.

A new centrality has emerged from the dynamic, a diffuse, amorphous, centrifugal new center which infuses the infrastructural networks of the periphery. At the same time, however, other centralities have not disappeared. The centripetal forces generated by the focus of the infrastructure towards the historical core – by the knots in the web, the increasing fineness of the mesh and density of connectivity as one approaches the center – are if anything stronger by being opposed to a powerful alternative polarity. The whole system, seen at the regional or metropolitan scale, will in any event generate unevennesses, nodes within the network, 'edge cities' tied to strategic positions in the regional web. The traditional centers will tend to be strategic positions in this web anyway, but then supercharged by their intense mesh of connectivity at the finer scale, and by the density of embedded lives and interactivity.

So the traditional center, at first sight an opposite polarity of the centrality of the regional network, is also fed by this network. European centers have become stronger, more intensely used than ever they used to be. But at the same time their programmatic logic has changed. The whole city is no longer the traditional center; rather, the center is a component of an extended node-and-network urbanization which includes those encapsulated, controlled, monofunctional spaces on the regional network, and which has to be considered as a whole if one wants to understand the way other orders, including those of class and power and that of community, are spatialized.

It is also clear that the respective centralities of the center and the periphery – each with their own characteristic speeds and scales – don't each remain tidily in their own places. There is increasingly, also within the fabric of the traditional center, a weaving of the orders and scales of activity of each through the other. And this weaving clearly doesn't, as one might perhaps at first expect, lead to an increasing uniformity of the scales and intensities of activity within the urban field. Rather, it seems to generate increasing contrasts within an increasingly complex configuration of urban places as the new centrality of the periphery penetrates deep into the old urban 'inside'. Infrastructural connection at the metropolitan and regional scales mean that at these scales connective efficiencies increase, but in terms of a matrix of adjacent central urban places, spatial and functional fragmentation is more the character of the new

order. The old urban grid, the integrating spatial matrix of the traditional city, is in danger of giving way (even within the limits of the traditional center) to a matrix of high-value places, often highly designed and highly connected to the new scales, which come or are designed into being, interspersed within a low-value, relatively unconsidered, relatively unconnected space whose nature is becoming increasingly problematic. The ambitious and boosterist plan for the area along Amsterdam's waterfront in the vicinity of Central Station is a case in point.

The contained, circumscribed space-time and experience of the medieval city with its shared significant localities and shared significant moments has given way to an extended, vectorized space-time, where the limits between the city and the world dissolve, and where shared experience and shared place are the result of being absorbed within a concentration of people brought together and divided in a whirl of movement. The bulk of this movement is generated through the larger-scale networks, opening up new swathes of territory on the periphery, but squeezing itself also into the space of the traditional center, where delicate networks of places are transformed forever.

### **Schisms in social space**

*The Wibaut Axis, seen in plan, is an inner-city boulevard stretched through the urban fabric from Amstel Station in the south to the waterfront in the north. On the ground however, it is marked by the noise of its traffic, by the general dilapidation of the surrounding fabric at its southern end and by the rather alien, disconnected, edge-city-like business-node urban renewal to the north. The Wibaut Axis has stood high in the priorities of Amsterdam's spatial planning department for many years and continues to resist all efforts to make of it a district with some kind of relationship with the urban fabric in which it is physically embedded.*

*A knot of slower-moving cars held up the stream of traffic and the lights turned red in front of us. I wished now I'd taken the ring road. She had been considering crossing in front of the slower cars but had thought better of it. As the lights turned green she wheeled her bicycle loaded with shopping bags over the pedestrian crossing towards the baker on the corner of the 1st Oosterparkstraat.*

*In this city with more than its fair share of pedestrian and bicycle traffic, most people experience the Wibaut Axis from their cars. Many of them experience it only in passing, on their way by the route of least resistance from Amsterdam South-East to Amsterdam North, because the Wibaut Axis is directly connected to, is in fact an integral part of, the regional motorway network. Some motorists use it as a distribution route into the center itself – into Amsterdam South and Amsterdam East – but only at one or two points of crossing with the Wibaut Axis itself.*

*An urban boulevard is more than a mobility axis. It is a piece of urban fabric knitted into the plan by its crossings, completed as functional space by the interdependence of axis and crossings (and the social material they carry) which feed each other and in their exchange establish the life and identity of the area. But the Wibaut Axis knows few of its crossings, and its crossings know it only as a noisy obstruction. This is a spatial relationship between lives operating at radically different speeds, speeds whose differences thwart contact and prohibit interaction. Axis and area are at best indifferent to one another. One cannot really even speak of copresence, nor is there any significant intersection of economic lives at the street edge. Here we have a shearing of the social space that has everything to do with the insertion of the alien speed and scale and the dis-located one-dimensional vector space of the periphery into the complex two-dimensional social-spatial fabric of the center.*

### **The changing shape of the traditional center**

The urban place of the underside of the rail viaduct with its dispirited homeless and heroin-whores is a product of these processes and transformations, as is the Kalverstraat with its chain stores and boutiques and its hordes of Sunday regional shoppers. This is about the way urban space is lived in the first place. The mechanics of the city are an emergent mechanics, and the social-spatial structure an emergent structure, a product of the aggregations and condensations of clouds of micro-effects, producing structure which reveals itself not just in activity patterns but also in urban 'condition' and character. The attractors, the shape-givers in this restless fluid field, are the infrastructures, tissues and webs, the physical armatures that gather, concentrate and condense the flux at different levels of scale. The clouds of micro-effects even seem to *seek* these armatures in a complex gridded fabric and may flip relatively suddenly from one to another, as fluxes and their scales and intensities alter.

Conflicts and contradictions between different scales and different speeds and mobilities, underlie many current quarrels and controversies about development in Amsterdam. The historic core, highly connected to the region via Central Station, has found a new vitality as a regional shopping and entertainment center. At the same time, people who manage still to live relatively cheaply in the center (and remember this was a key achievement of the popular activism of the late 1960s and 70s) find this possibility under threat as rents and the demand for retail space and expensive city-center apartments rise. In fact, the space of the historic core has in the meantime performed one of those 'phase changes' from being one thing to being quite another. Popular conceptions (and this one can read in any number of local election manifestos) still hold onto a notion of the center belonging to the city itself and to its municipal inhabitants. Meanwhile, its space and centrality has increasingly been absorbed into that of the metropolitan region. The key element in the displacement of the center at the scale of the traditional city itself is Central Station, and processes of change were already under way soon after it was built.<sup>9</sup> These processes have only gained force and accelerated as the mobilities of the general population have increased.

### **Displaced centers**

*Walking down the Damrak towards Central Station on a Saturday morning, one can hardly help noticing that one is moving against the tide. The station spews them out: groups of youngsters from Alkmaar and Purmerend out on the town, mothers and daughters, arm-in-arm on shopping sprees, couples, singles, old and young; all making a day of it. Dodging to the other side of the road to avoid the worst of it, one has to sidestep the cars of lost visitors and tourists, circling in limbo, in vain hope of finding parking. The Kalverstraat, the center's quality shopping street of the first half of the last century, concentrates now on jeans and jackets fashion and fast turnover, while Emporio Armani, DKNY, Mexx and Joop have found a home for themselves between the cafés and restaurants on the PC Hoofstraat far to the south.*

*This is where you are most likely to bump into faces familiar from the TV, or the Establishment figures of Dutch literature, film and theatre and Amsterdam's assorted minor glitterati in their Porsches and Mercedes. Here and on the adjacent sections of the van Baerlestraat and the Willemsparkweg is the gathering spot for the well-to-do of Amsterdam South. It is also home to the Concertgebouw, the Stedelijk and Rijks Musea, and a few more of that dispersed network of trendy hangouts.*

*The Vondelpark is a central social mixer, attracting the local rich as well as the poor from further away – as is the Leidseplein entertainment area, but a short step away, which comprises a few hundred cafés, bars and restaurants.*

The mobility flux at traditional city scale has found itself a new center, or rather a string of centers (including both the PC Hooftstraat area and the former *volksbuurt* already mentioned) around a spatial armature which defined the edge of the city as it was in the early twentieth century. We are not experiencing the first 'flight to the periphery' in the city's history. Indeed, it may be that the movement of centers to edges is a generic spatial effect related to scale increases – to increases in city size combined with accompanying increases in mobility.

A new metro line is proposed that will connect the South Axis, a new commercial development on the ring road, with Central Station and the historical core. The North-South line will form part of a network of improved inner-city mobility – but it is also directly connected at both ends to the regional network and will draw the influence of the new regional centrality still further into the fabric, beyond the historic center and well into the old *volksbuurten*. Accelerating already established processes of gentrification, it will change places of *buren* (neighbors) and *buurthuizen* (community centers) still more rapidly into places of high-priced pieds-à-terre and wine and sushi-bars, while at the same time relatively peripheralizing – consigning to the 'new outside' – adjacent stretches of fabric.

The popular opposition to the metro comes from local interest groups who have read the writing on the wall all too well. Proponents of the metro point out that the urban community no longer accords with its popular image; the *buren* have long been dissipating to Almere and Purmerend, regional satellites of Amsterdam, to be replaced by successive waves of the young, the footloose and economic migrants, and more recently by the yuppies and soupies (slightly older urban professionals) attracted by the density of amenity and entertainment and the anonymous, uncommitted conviviality that the center offers.

### **The new urban machine**

We live in a time when we all seem to have become travelers. What distinguishes our lives from lives lived in the past is that we feel, or imagine we feel, the loss of a sure foot in a rooted and permanent 'somewhere', located by spire and clock tower and embodying a centered place and an ordered time. We can imagine therefore that we have lost the possibility for a centered place in our present-day urbanism, that the conditions that produced that kind of place have gone and that we are doomed forever to rehash a more substantial past in mannered interiors, protected from the rush of contemporary existence. We can forget that movement has always been the motor of our urban experience and that time has always been differentiated by rhythms and continuities in space, speeds of movement, and location relative to the dominant networks of the system as a whole. The experience of the traveler and that of the inhabitant are both mediated by movement; the difference between them is one of degree, of a different proportional relationship in the intersection of space and time and the inhabiting of differently scaled networks. The space of the contemporary city may be characterized by a dizzying increase in speed, but this increase is by no means constant over the urban field. It is still highly differentiated and still offers multiple opportunities within its variable surface for the dense, solid experience of place.

There was a clear logic to the pre-metropolitan city; and it was one which related to movement rather than to program. It was a logic that was read over and over again through people's everyday movements, through perceptual encounters with a richly-structured, immersive urban world, and it was a logic through which people experienced their relationship with others and with society as a whole. These movements related the part to the whole by way of elements we all knew and understood. The spaces of the neighborhood centered themselves on high streets, and it was through the high street that contact was made with a wider, more diverse and anonymous

public. These centers had the ability to adapt to social trends and influences, and to reflect the times we lived in. In fact it was often on the streets of these sorts of places that change first made itself known. These were (and are still, in the best cases) the centers that made 'provision for the fact of history, for the unintended, for the contradictory, for the unknown'.<sup>10</sup>

Amsterdam demonstrates the remarkable spatial and urban logic that still exists within the urban field. Many of the changes we experience in our cities today, far from being chaotic or unpredictable, are a more or less systematic consequence of changes in the scales of our lives (of the addition of larger scales to already existing layerings of scales). We are not going to alter the fact that the city has become something else. What we need is the knowledge, political insight and will, and the planning instruments to establish socially and culturally open and diverse 'footholds in the flux'; centers that are immersive environments not just in the surface furniture of public space, but in the way as environments, they structure the relations between dynamic populations, opening viable interfaces between circuits of local and higher social scales. Our task in planning and maintaining the city is not so much to provide access and space, as it is to make place. And that seems to be a matter of animation, of close attention to the real world and the details of lives and how they add together in urban space. The world we make can be one that originates in the mean abstractions of access and program, or in the richness of a finely observed choreography of urban social space as it really is. The case of Amsterdam points us in the second direction.

- 1 See G. Mak, *Amsterdam: A brief life of the city*, London: Harvill Press, 1999.
- 2 The whole idea of there being a world 'out there' opposed to the world in our heads is perhaps questionable - a product of Cartesian thinking. Nevertheless, this Cartesian split highlights how the city is more than its status as an object could account for, and how it can change fundamentally without there being a lot of change in the physical fabric we observe in the center itself.
- 3 See for example T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, London: Routledge, 2000, especially Chs 10 'Building, dwelling, living' and 11 'The temporality of the landscape'.
- 4 The habitus is society written into the body according to Bourdieu (P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, London: CUP, 1977). One of the ways this writing is performed, I suggest, is through the body's being embedded in the scaled networks of the city. The 'habitus' is not simply related to place through static occupation; it is also a product of the dynamic intersection of these different worlds with all that implies for the copresence and encounter with other worlds.
- 5 If the space of the city is an astronomically dense web of relations continuously being constructed in our everyday actions and interactions, then place is this web seen from one point. The properties of place (or at least the interesting properties) are seldom found in that place itself. Rather, they are found in the way place is a product of this space.
- 6 G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Boston, Mass: Beacon, 1969.
- 7 L. De Cauter, 'The capsule and the network: Preliminary notes for a general theory', in *OASE 54*, Nijmegen: Uitgeverij SUN, 2001.
- 8 S.Sassen, *The Global City*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- 9 M. Wagenaar, 'Amsterdam 1860-1940: een bedrijvige stad', in E. Taverne and I. Visser (eds) *Stedebouw: de geschiedenis van de stad in de Nederlanden van 1500 tot heden*. Nijmegen: Uitgeverij SUN,. 1993, p. 220.
- 10 R. Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder*, New York: Norton, 1970, p. 99.