

THE HORIZONTAL METROPOLIS: A RADICAL PROJECT

VIII INTERNATIONAL PHD SEMINAR 'URBANISM & URBANIZATION' | SYMPOSIUM LATSIS EPFL 2015



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“The Horizontal Metropolis”: a radical project

The general theme for the 2015 U&U¹ Seminar is “*The Horizontal Metropolis: a radical project*”. Horizontal Metropolis is both an image and a concept, it is a lens through which to view the form of the contemporary city, conceptualizing it and constructing it as a project. It refers to a specific spatial condition characterized by a horizontality of infrastructure, urbanity, relationships, and by closely interlinked, co-penetrating rural/urban realms, communication, transport and economic systems. Contemporary urban figures such as *Città diffusa* in Northern Italy, *Desakota* in Asia or *ville horizontale* in Africa, fine grained settlement dispersion in Flanders, or *Zwischenstadt* in Germany are just some of the examples able to effectively describe this emergent urban condition, increasingly related to the dispersion of the urban fabric within the agricultural landscape. The Horizontal Metropolis concept considers these figures as beyond a simplistic center/periphery opposition, revealing the dispersed condition as a potential asset, rather than a limit, to the construction of a sustainable and innovative urban dimension.

Historically this specific spatial condition has provided test cases for the elaboration of original urban theories. Today the radical nature of the change underway is forcing these territorial constructions to face new challenges, paradoxes and crises, from a social, economical and environmental point of view.

The fundamental hypothesis of both the Seminar and of the Symposium is that the Horizontal Metropolis, as spatial capital and agent of transformation, may be supportive of a radically innovative urban and territorial project - and thus considered as an original urban ecology.

The U&U International PhD Seminars and the 2015 Latsis Symposium will investigate the “Horizontal Metropolis”, its space, its traditions, and its contemporary relevance as an energetic, ecological and social design framework. The dual aim of the event is to connect the specific questions arising in different urban contexts to larger international reflections and processes, and to valorize a multidisciplinary approach in discussing the Horizontal Metropolis.

- Three Sessions

The symposium intends to investigate the Horizontal Metropolis through three main fields of research:

1 The Horizontal Metropolis: spatial and natural capital

Different types of urbanity can be analyzed and compared starting from their measures, which are often the expression of deeply embedded rationalities. The session will concern those rationalities, such as: water management (natural systems, irrigation, drainage, drinkable water supply, waste water, energy); the productive landscape (qualities of soil, parcels and property size, presence of biodiversity, types of agriculture, mix of functions); accessibility (mobility networks, permeability and connectivity, exchange nodes, social infrastructures and amenities), potential and abilities of individuals and firms to move and to locate. The session will critically reflect upon the horizontal metropolis as a city-territory; the relation between natural and artificial rationalities; hybrid urban-territorial figures in relation to conditions of spatial and social justice. The objective of the session is to understand the different rationalization processes of the city-territory through an investigation of its measures, patterns and elements of coexistence. This session will focus on mapping, comparisons, typological reading, and environmental, social and urban analyses.

2 The Horizontal Metropolis: issues and challenges of a new urban ecology

In recent decades the city-territory has become a recognized and explicit object of policies and design: in academic research, but also in broader contexts where the awareness of this spatial, economic and social configuration is more mature. This session will critically reflect upon the radical nature of the changes underway and the emergence of new urban paradigms; scenarios and design strategies for re-cycling and upgrading the city-territory. The Horizontal

¹ The 8th edition of the U&U International PhD Seminar will be managed under the scientific direction of the Laboratory of Urbanism (Lab-U, EPFL) with the support of EDAR, EPFL's Doctorate School and Latsis Foundation.

Since 2004, the biannual U&U seminar has been inviting PhD candidates working on theory, history and practice of urbanism to present, confront and discuss themes and approaches coming from different PhD programs. The first seminar was organized by OSA-KU Leuven in February 2004 and was followed by others organized by UPC Barcelona, IUAV Venice, TU Delft and Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris-Malaquais. U&U International PhD Seminars seek to promote the exchange of ideas, provoke debate amongst researchers, invite comparisons, cross-pollinate different disciplines and highlight the latest ongoing research topics. It is a rare opportunity offered to young researchers to meet with prominent scientists and build a critical argument.

Metropolis as a renewable resource will be the main hypothesis of the session. Proposals that investigate forms of order strengthening horizontal relations, as distinct from standard hierarchical forms, will be supported. In a space where polarization and hierarchization processes are weakening horizontal networks – disconnecting or marginalizing territories and populations - the Horizontal Metropolis challenges dominant paradigms. This session will focus on scenarios, concepts and prototypes.

3 The Horizontal Metropolis: a transcultural tradition

The Horizontal Metropolis has come to the fore at different times throughout the history of city and territorial design. A thick legacy of concepts and of interpretations of urban phenomena through projects has been accumulated. This legacy is also the result of influences and exchanges among the main authors and among situations and interpretations in very distant parts of the world. The final session of the symposium intends to elaborate and investigate the role of exchanges and references in constructing, by integration or differentiation, various conceptions of these urban phenomena. This session will focus on theories, images, and archives.

With the help of ongoing research and contributions from the participating universities, the Seminar and the Symposium aim at documenting and discussing the changes underway in urbanism and the urban condition. A wide variety of research forms and interdisciplinary approaches such as urban analysis, design research, case studies and theoretical elaborations, are expected to nurture and to critically develop the theme.

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Adieu compact city¹

The Dutch case study and the discovery of the patchwork metropolis

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In 1989 the young Dutch architect Willem Jan Neutelings, who had just left the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, was called to develop a project for the area in between Rotterdam and the Hague that was going to face, in the next years, a huge increment of population and activities. This part of the Dutch territory is located in between two urban areas but, on the same time, it is located in the middle of another construction known as the Randstad, in which the explosive growth of urban or suburban phenomena has led to a singular blurring of the distinction between the city and the countryside.

In this context Neutelings proposed his reinterpretation of the urban form called 'De Tapijmetropool' or 'Patchwork Metropolis'.

Starting from a six pages long article published in the 1991, this paper will try to deconstruct the work of Neutelings, analysing the context and the sketches and reconstruct them in a more comprehensive model of urbanisation. Moreover a reinterpretation of the territory will try to understand if the Neutelings' prevision has found a real effect in the contemporary Randstad territorial configuration.

The Patchwork Metropolis of Willem Jan Neutelings

The Patchwork Metropolis was published in 1991, in a small monograph that the 010 Publishers² dedicated each year to the winner of the Maaskant prize for the young Dutch architect of the year. In 1989 the young "Enlightened prince of suburbia", as Neutelings was appointed in the jury report, got commissioned by the Department of Housing development of the Municipality of the Hague to study and design the area of the Zuidrand in between The Hague and Delft that afterwards faced a huge increment of population and activities becoming internationally known as the Ypenburg neighbourhood. From this typical peripheral zone, Neutelings enlarged his focus point describing the area in between The Hague and Rotterdam as a continuous field of patches reaching from the North Sea to the Nieuwe Maas river.

In order to correctly interpret the work of Neutelings is important to clarify that the discussion about the urbanisation in the Netherlands, since the eighties and the content of the various parts of the Third Memorandum on Spatial Planning³, is characterised by the concept of the city region and by the fear of the phenomenon of dispersion. Huge planning efforts are spent to maintain the city regions compact and manageable by setting always-new boundaries between what were the ancient cities that compose the Randstad and the portion of territory called Green Hearth. So the doctrine underlying the Dutch policy at this governmental level is based on the objective to separate 'red' functions from 'green' function.

In this overruled context the fortune of the Neutelings' proposal was immediately very large, able to influence a generation of young Dutch designers, especially for the capacity of the patchwork model to criticize the planning practices of the late eighties and to give a structure to what was thought as a just fragmented condition, turning the Randstad lack of coherence – in contrast to what official planners thought the existing structure of the Randstad looked like – into its planning solution, into a breeding ground of prospective projects

It is possible to distinguish in the work of Neutelings two sets of drawings which synthetize both the two scales and the two objectives of the work. From one side, a thirty-by-thirty kilometres frame⁴ — consisting of the area in between Rotterdam, The Hague and Leiden — allowed Neutelings to personally reinterpret the large-scale condition of the South Wing province of the Randstad and to introduce the metaphor of the Patchwork. From the other, at the scale of the patches — coinciding with the area of Ypenburg — he presented his design exercise through the definition of a catalogue of solutions and design possibilities.

At the patchwork scale Neutelings represented the territory through two pen sketches [fig.1]. The first interprets the area in between the Hague and Rotterdam as a series of black urban figures on top of a white background, highlighting the conceptual simplification behind the common way to understand the urban condition in which "the absurd notion of a romantic polarity between a paradisaic Arcadia and a megalomaniac metropolis, a red stain sprawling in an endless expanse of green. [...] has long been inadequate for interpreting the reality of the situation" (Neutelings, 1991). The second sketch reconsiders the same area through a critical reinterpretation. The territory is presented as a composition of patches, each one with a

¹ The title of this essay is referred to the title of a chapter of the book: Bosma K. and Hellings H., 1998. *Mastering the City: North European City Planning, 1900-2000*. Rotterdam: Nai Uitgevers

² Neutelings, WJ 1991, *Willem Jan Neutelings Architect*, Uitgeverij 010, Rotterdam.

³ In Dutch *Derde Nota voor de Ruimtelijke Ordening* published in four parts from 1973 to 1983.

⁴ That in the rest of this essay will be called 'the patchwork scale'.

specific functional program and a specific physical structure. If we take a close look at the image we can notice that not only the ‘periphery’ – the area usually labelled as such – is a composition of patches but also the inner cities and agricultural areas ranging from rural to greenhouse complexes are transformed into a series of patterns. The maps present a drastic new interpretation of the territory, in which the “juxtaposition of shifting fragments seems to define the structure’s single element of consistency” (Beelen, 2010).

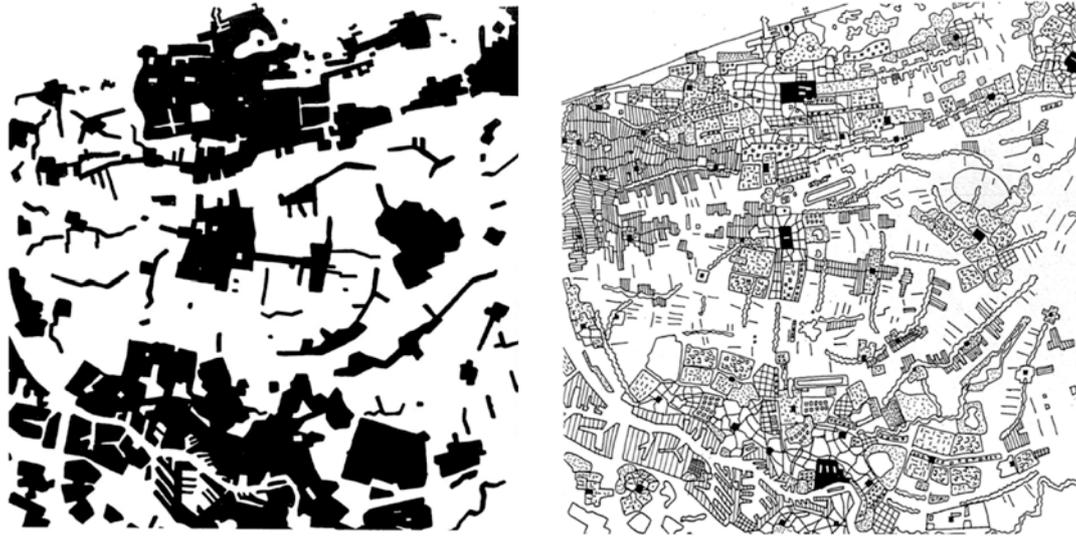


Figure 1: The Patchwork Metropolis. On the left: the urbanisation as a figure on a white background. On the right: the Neutelings' reinterpretation.

At the patches' scale Neutelings designed the area of the Zuidrand through the use of several analytical sketches, diagrams [fig.2] and a large maquette that clarified the scale and the conditions of the future development of the area. A series of collages [fig.3] synthetize the results of the design. New commercial boulevard displaced along a motorway, socio-bungalows with a wide range of accessories, a linear park crowned by duplexes and roof garden dwellings, a square for events arranged below a motorway spaghetti node, dwellings for retired people positioned close to a golf course represent the abacus of new patches that are carefully inserted in the patchwork according to some parameters of proximity and accessibility. Highways, secondary streets, tram lines are then superposed creating a framework able to mesh the new and pre-existing patches into a coherent system. It is important to notice that if in the thirty-by-thirty kilometers drawing the infrastructure, that are displaced in between the patches, are not directly considered — probably for the sake of the clarity and the expressive power of the drawing — in the design of the patches the street and rail networks are the fundamental tool used to connect the patches in between them and with the overall system.

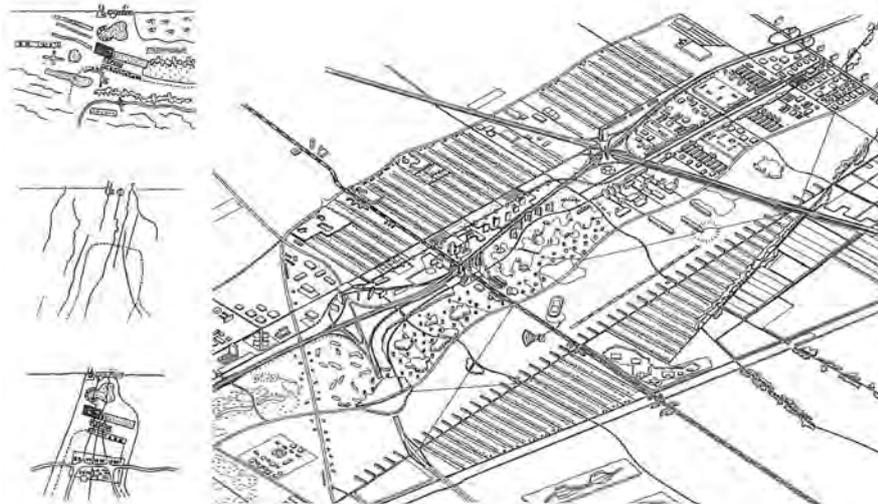


Figure 2: The design of the Zuidrand

The operation of rescaling of the design focus, from the large scale of the patchwork to the single elements of the patches, produced an interesting and singular urban model able to consider both the enlarged urban condition — in which the ‘new’ metropolis is in the scale of the region and in the form of a field — and a vocabulary of design solutions detectable — from the author’s point of view⁵ — just at the scale of the patches. Therefore the Neutelings’ project is not simply the analytical description of the Dutch territorial configuration in 1989, but should be interpreted as a radical project able to indicate the coordinates at which, in the future, the design should take place.

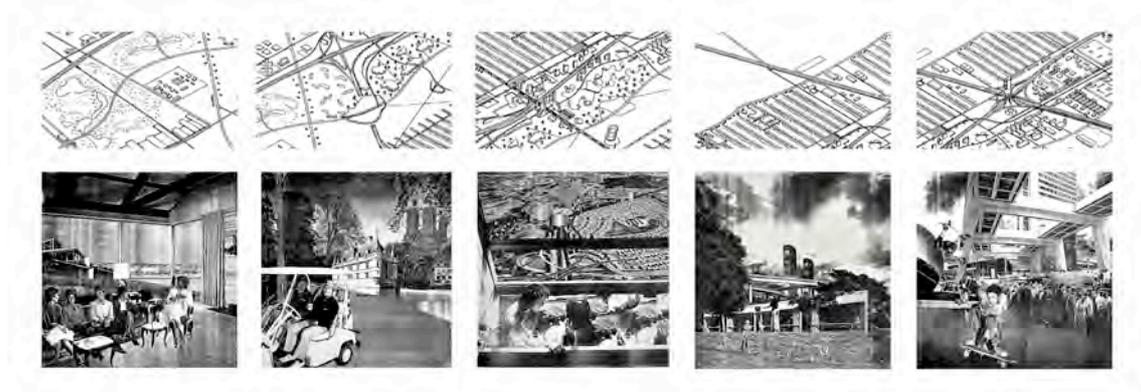


Figure 3: The design of the Zuidrand - Collages

Each bastard gets his own genealogical tree⁶

The Patchwork Metropolis deserves to be inserted in the list of the so-called site-specific manifestos. As other similar examples⁷ it is a composition of theoretical constructions based into a specific territory. In the following paragraphs I will try to unravel the theoretical metaphor of the patchwork by displacing both the element of the patch and the structure of the patchwork in a theoretical perspective. This operation will allow not only to understand the similarities and differences between urban models, but also to clarify each time the peculiarities of the patchwork with the aim return a specific and precise urban model.

The Patch, the Part and the Fragment

Paola Viganò in her research about ‘elementarism’ indicated that “Wittgenstein has pointed out how complicated is to define ‘the simple constituent parts of which reality consists’; ‘What are the simple constituents parts of a chair?’ he asks. ‘The pieces of wood from which it is made? Its molecules? Its atoms? Simple means: not composite. And this is the point: composite in what sense?’ (Wittgenstein, 1952)” (Viganò, 1999). The selection of the elements that compose the reality is a complex operation that requires a design-based procedure of reduction of complexity. The interpretative operation – intrinsic to the construction of urban models and metaphors – is intimately linked with a process of selection of the right scale⁸ at which a territory should be looked, of the elements that should be drawn and that one that are unnecessary or even misleading, of the categories, or the different nuances of colours, through which the reality can be reduced.

It is interesting to see how Neutelings looked at kind of medium grain, in between the oversimplification of the planning maps and the complexity presented in the topographical maps, deciding that, for him, the best scale at which it is possible to understand this part of the Randstad was a the patch scale.

The patch – as conceptual and theoretical entity – has been used in many disciplines. In landscape ecology for instance this term indicates a wide “relatively homogeneous areas that differs from their surroundings” (Forman, 1995), a composed ecosystem or habitat that is physically discernible from the others.

Part, fragment, cell, zone are just some of the conceptual construction used, during the last century in urbanism, sociology, ecology and spatial planning, to understand and design this intermediate scale. Even if

⁵ At this regard is relevant to quote an extract of an interview carried by the Author to Willem Jan Neutelings the 21st of June 2011: CP - Do you think that it is possible to guide the evolution of the patchwork metropolis? WJN - We stated that it was impossible to guide the territory at the Randstad scale. The only way in which we can guide the territory is at the patch level. You can replace the old patches with new ones, you can fragment the existing ones, but in the neo-liberal and market oriented society you cannot still think that it is possible to guide the Randstad as a whole.

⁶ Rem Koolhaas, “The terrifying beauty of the 20th Century” (1985), in S,M,L,XL (Rotterdam, 1995), 208.

⁷ Examples of site-specific manifesto include: *Learning from las vegas* (Venturi, Scot-Brown, Izenour, 1972), *Chicago à la Carte* (Alvin Boyarsky, 1970), *Los angeles: the Architecture of four ecologies* (Rayner Banham, 1971), *Collage city* (Colin Rowe, 1978) *Berlin as a green Archipelago* (Ungers, Koolhaas, 1977). See: Hertweck F., Marot S., 2013. *The City in the City: Berlin: A Green Archipelago*. Ennetbaden: Lars Muller.

⁸ Here ‘scale’ is intended both as ‘resolution’, so the level of detail of the representation, and as ‘frame’, so the boundary at which the drawing can be cropped.

the transition between them is often quite fuzzy, the patch – as a theoretical figure – maintains some specificities that could be highlighted through a series of comparisons.

The concept of patch, for instance, is opposed to the idea of fragment⁹, which always involves some form of nostalgia. As inherent parts of modernity, the notion of metropolis and fragmentation have been closely connected from the first¹⁰. From Georg Simmel, who intended the metropolis in terms of flux and fragmentation, to Adorno that highlighted the distance between the modernity and the idea of harmonic aesthetic completion¹¹ the juxtaposition, accumulation, or succession of fragments has been intended as an intimate quality of the modern metropolis able to interpret its complex and chaotic composition.

Antony Vidler pointed out the double connotation of the fragment: “In the History of modern art and aesthetics, the fragment has had a double signification. As a reminder of the past once whole but now fractured and broken, as a demonstration of the implacable effects of time and the revenge of nature, it has taken on the connotation of nostalgia and melancholy, even of history itself. As an incomplete piece of a potentially complete whole, it has pointed toward a possible world of harmony in the future, a utopia perhaps, that it both represents and constructs” (Vidler, 2000). Moving away from the concept of fragment, the Neutelings’ patches represent the Vidler’s research of harmony, of an utopia built on “semi-autonomous cells, each with its own logic and interested actors” (Shane, 2005), planned and designed as such and displaced across the landscape.

One of the drawings that Neutelings used to accompany his text was a reinterpretation of the Naked City of Debord in which several urban and rural patterns were connected and related through lines and arrows. As Dirk van den Heuvel noticed¹², the Patchwork should be inserted inside the long wave of the Dutch situationists that goes from Constant to Rem Koolhaas. As Guy Debord wanted to transform the known geography through the mapping of the situations — with the attempt to transform the spectators into participants — Neutelings drawn the patches as the representation of the variegated forms of living or lifestyles¹³ of the Netherlands. In the series of black and white montages [fig.3], that visually express the new designed patches, Neutelings displayed the new lifestyles that can take place in the area of the Zuidrand. Therefore the thirty-by-thirty kilometres frame is not populated just by urban patterns or morphological parts formally completed¹⁴ but by living environments in which the internal consistency is defined by the situations and the activities that can be developed. As Karl Beelen sharply noted, the unsteady style of the drawing also suggest that what Neutelings wanted to address was not a precise and detailed definition of borders and entities but rather the description of a shifting and unstable condition¹⁵. Living in a detached house along a canal or in a cauliflower estate immersed in a wild nature, working in a business park along the A4 or in an warehouse’s complex along the Mass and relaxing in a park alongside a lake are the new categories proposed to increase the nuances of this part of the Dutch periphery.

The Patchwork, the Archipelago and the Carpet

The passage from a series of singular elements to the construction of a complex system implies to reason around the rationality that guide the process of insertion, arrangement and assemblage¹⁶ of several patches displaced – apparently randomly – along the mobility network. “If we want to understand the patchwork as a theoretical metaphor, we have to start from the Appalachian woman that sew the patchworks starting their work without a real pre-set plan, but just with a set of guidelines declined according to the raw material that they have. The work is guided by their own taste in juxtaposing patches of different sizes and colours. In the urban field we can compare this process with the attribute of compatibility of visual, functional and scalar characters of the patches”¹⁷.

Moving from the metaphor to the real territorial configuration, the process of assemblage can be engaged in two ways. From one side it is possible to easily justify the rationalities that guide the displacement of patches along the transport network and the administrative boundaries. A business park, for instance, needs a fast

⁹ For a more accurate analyses of the concept of fragment in urbanism see: Secchi, B., 2007. *Prima lezione di urbanistica*. Roma: Laterza. And Jacobs, S. 2012. Shreds of Boring Postcards: Toward a Posturban Aesthetics of the Generic and the Everyday. In: Ghent Urban Studies Team (Eds), 2012. *Post Ex Sub Dis.: Urban Fragmentations and Constructions*. Rotterdam: 010 Uitgeverij.

¹⁰ see Berman, M., 1982. *All that is solid Melts into Air: The experience of modernity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

¹¹ see Adorno, T.W., 1970. *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 7: Aesthetische Theorie. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

¹² Heuvel, D. ‘Occupation of Desires: Concerning the Sudden Topicality of Situationism’. *Archies* 1992/2, pp.72-78

¹³ Lifestyle is used as the way to define the prevalent behavior of a specific social group. See Weber, M., 1978. *Economy and Society*, Oakland: University of California Press.

¹⁴ With *part of city formally completed* I am referring to the Italian tradition of urban morphologists founded by Muratori and Caniggia during the sixties and led by Rossi and Aymonino between sixties and seventies.

¹⁵ See Beelen, K., 2010. Imag(en)ing the Real. The ‘Region’ as a Project of Cartographic Re-Configuration. In: Meijsmans, N., 2010. *Designing for a Region*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij SUN.

¹⁶ On that regard Paola Viganò has compared the images of patchwork, collage-city, domino and puzzle for their capacity to focus attention on process of assembling individual pieces and defining weak or loose criteria that enable them to be positioned in relation to one another. See Viganò P., 1999. *La città elementare*. Milano: Skira.

¹⁷ This paragraph is an excerpt of the discussions between the author and Bernardo Secchi and is inserted in the author’s post master thesis. See Pisano, C., 2011 *Colouring the patchwork metropolis* (TU Delft repository).

access to the highway, a marina or a dockland has to be connected with the course of a main river, an urban development has to be displaced within the municipality boundary and connected with a tramline to a service centre. On the other side, when the patchwork is crossed with a car or a train, a weak understanding of the combination and proximity of functions replaces these rationalities. Indeed the physical proximity of activities, crowds and signs assembled in an seemingly chaotic way, has moved Neutelings to state, with a peculiar and paratactic language, that “a twenty-minute drive takes the Randstad-dweller past sculptural oil refineries, colourful bulb-fields, intimate garden cities, medieval rings of canals, eight-lane motorways, hypermarkets, functional high-rise estates, lakes for recreation, old Dutch windmills, university campuses, tourist beaches, protected dune landscapes, glass roofs of greenhouses, reflecting business parks, motels and furniture megastores, rubbish tips and golf courses, airfields, markets, squares and mosques.” (Neutelings, 1991) The Patchwork is then a composition of a series of entities arranged together, in which a superior unity or comprehensive plan is missing. It does not contemplate any explicit syntax¹⁸, but just a vocabulary of patches. The parataxis¹⁹ technique in literature, the “note by note” organisation of pieces of musical syntax and the collages of the Dadaists and Robert Rauschenberg art works seem prolific fields of analyses, and comparison of the patchwork metaphor in urbanism.

The Patchwork Metropolis can be inserted into the prolific field of urban metaphors that have tried to define the contemporary enlarged urban condition by overcoming the stagnant contraposition between urban and rural. Some of the highlighted characteristics — like the rhythmic and looming assemblage method or the grain of the territorial representation — sign the distance between the patchwork and other horizontal models like the archipelago or the carpet.

The title ‘Patchwork Metropolis’ was intended as the English translation of ‘*Tapijtmetropool*’, literally carpet metropolis. The carpet is a metaphor broadly used and differently declined to interpret the phenomena of dispersion from the Flemish to the Veneto region. Synthetically, in the carpet, a dense and isotropic network of infrastructure is gradually urbanised through a process based on individual or familiar decisions. In the Patchwork, instead, each patch is “fixed from top to bottom [...]”; any further development is impossible. The whole forms a system of inert fragments that are unable to admit any further dynamic in time” (Neutelings, 2000). If the carpet can be seen as a piece of fabric in which step-by-step new details can be added, new stitches can be sewed, the patches are portions of ready made tissues stitched once and for all to the main work. In this sense the gap in between the two models is related not only on the scale or the grain of the representation — in fact the patches can indistinctly be large or small — but especially on the dynamic level and on the political and social environments in which these two models can take place.

Another interesting image, often used to interpret an enlarged urban condition is the Archipelago. The Archipelago model is based, according to Massimo Cacciari, “on a space of coexistence, the sea, and of absence, the lost or never achieved unity” (Cacciari, 1997). In the patchwork this element of separation — the sea — tends towards zero or should be seen as a space that is waiting to be developed. What Ungers and Koolhaas reduced to the status of a green grid “a catalogue of types that range from suburb to parkland to dense forests and even to urban farmland” (Hertweck and Marot, 2013), for Neutelings are thick elements that have the dignity of patches, exactly as the historical centres. Nevertheless the concepts of the island and the patch share the peculiarity of being ‘intolerant of any subordination and hierarchical organisation [...] in constant tension between the need to engage in dialogue and its own individualities’ (Cacciari, 1997). This anti-hierarchical character that links the islands, the patches, but also the cells in the Gloeden metropolis is one of the fundamental peculiarity of the field and horizontal conditions. The presence of dominant centres or nodes — typical of the urban metaphor translated from mobility models such as the polycentric or network cities — is replaced by the juxtaposition of several equal elements²⁰ in which also the historical centres have to be considered as ‘*primus inter pares*’ (first among equals)²¹.

Finally, another distinctive character of the patchwork should be highlighted. The Neutelings’ model shares many similarities — perhaps just by chance — with the work of the American landscape ecologist Richard T.T Forman. Similarly to the Forman’s Land Mosaics (1995) and to other, more recent, Landscape Character Assessment methods²², the Patchwork is able to mesh natural and human systems into a single model²³.

¹⁸ Quite explicitly Neutelings stated “Holland is, to be sure, made up of individual chunks of city, but there’s virtually no network, all told only one railway and one motorway stitch the fragments together. ‘Corridor’ - another official concept suggesting cohesion - is a misleading word if ever there was one. All it boils down to here is a succession of enclaves along a motorway slip road that will never develop into true urban axes.” (Neutelings, 2000)

¹⁹ The parataxis (from Greek for ‘act of placing side by side’) is a literary technique that favours short sentences with the use of coordinating rather than subordinating conjunctions. Fish, S., 2012. *How to write a sentence: And how to read one*. New York: Harpercollins.

²⁰ At this regard see the brilliant way in which Stan Allen (1985) defined the field condition: “any formal or spatial matrix capable of identifying diverse elements while respecting the identity of each”.

²¹ See the description of Paola Viganò of the Gloeden’s Diagram in Viganò, P., 2013. *The Horizontal Metropolis and Gloeden’s Diagrams. Two Parallel Stories*. *Oase*, 89, pp. 94-111.

²² At this regard see the research that Alexandra Tiesma et al. have developed about the different Landscape Character Assessment methods in Tisma, A., van der Velde, R., Nijhuis, S., & Pouderoijen, M. (2013). *A method for metropolitan landscape characterization; case study Rotterdam*. SPOOL, 1(1). doi:10.7480/spool.2013.1.637

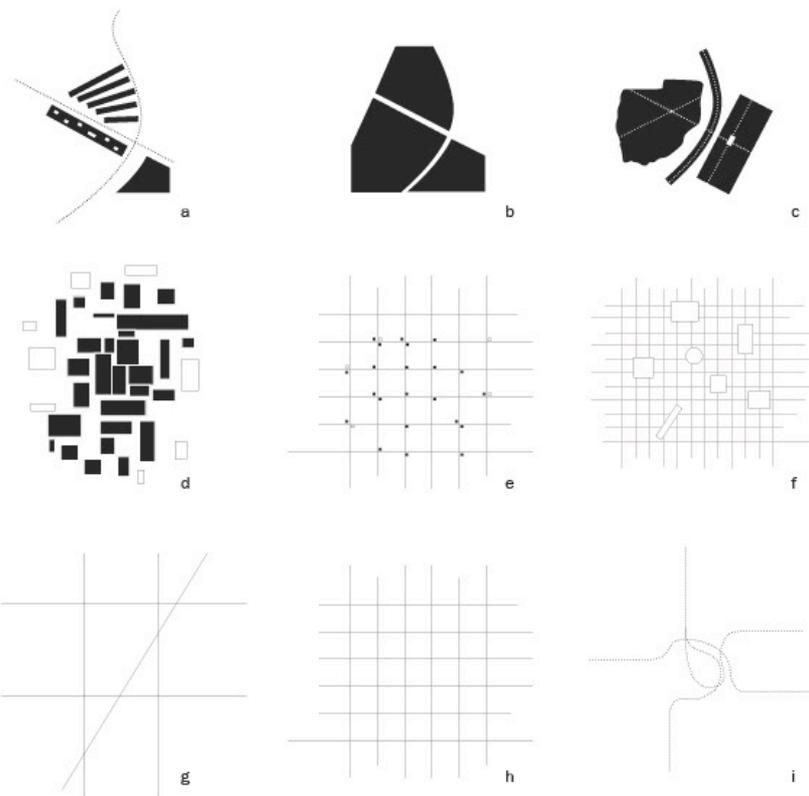


Figure 4: The genealogy of the patchwork. a-b-c: The relation between infrastructure and the part (a) the fragment (b) and the patch (c); d: The patchwork; e: The carpet; f: The archipelago; g-h-i: The network system connected with the patchwork (g) the carpet (h) and the archipelago. Source: Author own 2015.

The Patchwork, a Dutch story²⁴

In 1985 Dutt and Costa opened their study on Dutch planning as follows: “The Netherlands is decidedly the most planned country among the European nations. Only a few democracies of the world can match the planning apparatus of the Dutch governments. Such a state of affairs is a product of circumstances created by harsh environmental constraints, a challenging history, sociocultural forces, hard economic necessities, and the size of the country” (Dutt and Costa 1985). With this statement Dutt and Costa highlighted how the Netherlands is an exceptional case study, barely comparable with any other reality. In this part of the paper I will briefly pick some of the geographical and political peculiarities that influenced the territorial configuration, shaping – according to Neutelings – the Patchwork Metropolis. Furthermore I will explain how the Neutelings’s intuition can be seen as a wider paradigmatic project, able to interpret some of the transformations that the neoliberal revolution have produced, from the nineties on, in the European urban environment.

From a patched geography to a ‘segmented’²⁵ urbanisation

“From a geographical and topographical point of view, the long and laborious struggle with the water wolf bequeathed the country with more than dry feet. It became a source of moral inspiration throughout ages, a fair body of lessons for life” (Schama, 1988). The so depicted ‘moral geography’ is inextricably bound to the Dutch culture, society and territory and it is clearly represented with the peculiar geometrical pattern and straight lines that compose the complex polder machine. The subdivision of the territory into several hydrological entities is one of the first characteristics that can justify the creation of a patched urbanisation. Firstly — due to the fact that the operation of the territorial modification couldn’t be handled by individual

²³ It is important however to notice the distance between the sophisticated construction of the Forman’s Land Mosaic in which the patches are combined with corridors and the unifying element of the matrix and the Patchwork metropolis, at least in its first conception. If the first can be considered a paradigmatic construction able to interpret and guide the territorial transformation, the latter seems more a lucid understanding of a condition, free from any will to improve it.

²⁴ Some parts of this article, especially of the following chapter, have been developed thanks to the active contribution of Prof. Wil Zonneveld, Chair of Urban and Regional Development, Department of Urbanism, TU Delft.

²⁵ The term ‘segmented’ is used by Van Der Cammen, et al. to indicate the post-war Dutch urbanisation “composed by different districts each with their own character and mutually separated by routes, city parks or a green belt.” (Van Der Cammen, et al., 2012).

activities — the collective dimension, collaboration and democratic discussion are fundamental properties to deal with a complex and unstable delta landscape. Secondly the new urbanisation often followed the polder structure with a kind of flip-flop process, similar that described by Graham Shane in the transformation of some former estates in London²⁶.

Moreover the story and the evolution of the Dutch planning reveal that each stage has produced its own planning theories and constructions, but also that some basic questions are constant and continuously declined in different ways. Through the many planning documents and policies the urban discussion in the Netherlands has always been based on two fears. From one side the fear for the creation of a proper metropolis is related with the problems of congestion and the banishment of the proximity between the citizens and the natural environment that the production of large urban areas always involves. From the other the sub-urbanisation has always been seen as a phenomenon to be prevented in order to safeguard the blessed openness of the Dutch landscape.

Many schemes and policies have tried to find a balance between these two fears, from the J.P. Thijesse jr.'s linear city, proposed in 1957, to many national and provincial policy documents. In particular the Second National Policy Document, developed in 1966 represents a kind of milestone in the explicit definition of the direction that the Dutch planning would undertake in the following decades. Through the use of diagrammatic schemes [fig.5], three possible urbanisation patterns were developed. The first two clarified, like negative scenarios, the two fears expressed before: the urban concentration and the radical de-concentration. In between, the clustered suburbanisation within the city regions became the leitmotif to promote the creation of always mid-size green living environments.



Figure 5: The three national urbanisation patterns, according to the Second National Policy Document (1966). From left: urban concentration, radical de-concentration, and the preferred solution: the clustered suburbanisation. Source: Van Der Cammen, et al., 2012.

The clustered suburbanisation policy together with the concept of the neighbourhood units, that became fashionable from the late forties with the Alexander Bos book ‘The city of the Future, the Future of the city’²⁷, gave the starting shape to a segmented urbanised territory, able to create an efficient arranged urban fabric, offering easy spatial references to its inhabitants. Other national and provincial policies have substantially slightly shifted the balance proposed by the Second Nota, but the foundation stone of the patchwork was already laid.

After the Patchwork

The international relevance of the Patchwork project — that will be clarified in the conclusions — “is associated with a process that started in the late seventies with the second oil crises which is generally regarded as the watershed moment that signalled the end of the centre-left Keynesian politics and the coming of the age of the neo-liberal market concept” (Van Der Cammen, et al., 2012). The national authority program Bestek 81 with the slogan ‘more market and less government’²⁸ and the 1982 first Lubbers cabinet can be read as the official starting point of a process of deregulation, privatisation and public-private relations that seems not yet finished. Also the Dutch pillarised²⁹ society, in these years, started a process of complete reorganisation: “Central to this were not the big demographic categories such as the average family, the aged or the singles, but the lifestyle of the consumers of space” (Van Der Cammen, et al., 2012).

In such a social, cultural and economical environment Neutelings developed the project of the Patchwork Metropolis in which he “accepted the social, economic and physical limits and within them establish his own margins” (Vermuelen, 1991) starting to embrace and to foster the underlying premises of neoliberalism.

In order to understand the anticipatory capacity of the Patchwork project is necessary to look which policies and transformations take place in Netherlands after the 1990. The supplement of the 4th policy of spatial planning, released in 1991, proposed the creation of new housing developments called – as the mother policy

²⁶ See Rowe, C., 1978. *Collage city*. Chambridge: Mit Press

²⁷ Bos, A., 1946. *De stad der toekomst, de toekomst der stad: een stedenbouwkundige en sociaal-culturele studie over de groeiende stadsgemeenschap*. Amsterdam: A. Voorhoeve

²⁸ See Van Der Cammen, H., De Klerk, L., Dekker, G. and Witsen, P.P., 2012. *The Selfmade Land. Culture and evolution of urban and regional planning in The Netherlands*. Antwerpen: Spectrum

²⁹ The pillarisation is a term used to describe the organisation of the citizens according to the different religious and political identities.

– ‘*vinex*’³⁰. The new neighbourhood, planned close to the main dense centre were meant to strengthen the position and the economy of the main cities and were developed in the form of new patches isolated within the network of infrastructure. For the decentralisation processes many responsibilities moved, for the first time, to the local governments that, unable to deal with this responsibility, usually started long term contracts with developers. This process, that produced more than 800.000 new dwellings in a decade, improved tremendously the patched structure of the Randstad [fig.6] including not only new neighbourhoods, but also peri-urban parks, business and commercial centres.

Drawn in 1989, the Patchwork Metropolis was able to reveal something that was not yet evident, showing the constituent elements of the neoliberalism model. The way and the scale at which Neutelings looked and represent the territory is extremely similar to the way in which big companies and big real estate enterprises have also looked at it. The patches — described by Neutelings as fixed entities, designed and constructed once and for all — have then become the standard formula to implements the urbanisation in a process that cannot be limited just to the Netherlands. Clusters, islands, enclaves, gated communities or theme parks are just some of the well-known expressions used to depict the process of creation of new patches all over the world.

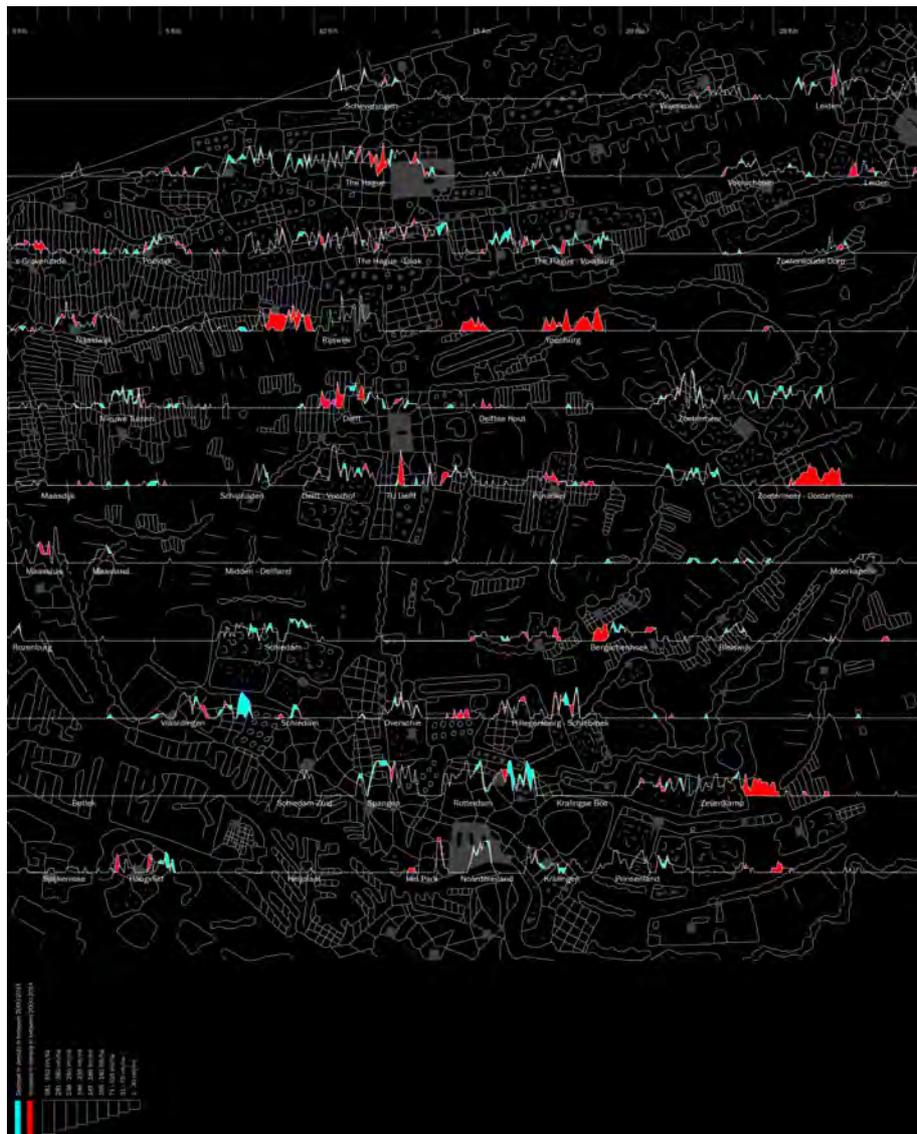


Figure 6: After the patchwork. The Patchwork Metropolis (Neutelings, 1989) and the change of inhabitant density between 2000 and 2014 (in red increase and in ciano decrease of the density). Source: CBS, Kaat met statistieken per vierkant van 100 bij 100 meter, 2014. Author own 2015.

³⁰ Acronym of *Vierde Nota over de Ruimtelijke Ordening Extra* published in 1991 as a completion of the Fourth Memorandum on Physical Planning published in 1988

Conclusions

What is the point to study today a six pages long article developed in 1989 by a 30 years old architect? This question obsessed the research since the beginning and periodically came back mining the stability and the balance of the over whole work. To this question I will try to give here a brief answer:

Firstly the Neutelings' project is a rich urban manifesto that worth to be inserted within the tradition of urban models and metaphors that range from the Russian and American 'dis-urbanists' to the Italian and English 'radicals' to the site-specific project of the sixties and seventies. The drawings and the montages are expressive and fresh, the text is sharp and ironic, the attitude of the author is provocative and anti-rhetoric. All these characteristics build a fascinating object rich of explicit and implicit cross-references with many important episodes of the history of urbanism.

"Travelling through Holland after an absence of some months, one gets the feeling it's been touched by a magic wand. Out of the blue there's a new wood here, a romantic district there, a gleaming business park down the road. Dutch urbanism occurs in fits and starts, and in large chunks: entire areas are transformed and fixed forever in one fell swoop" (Neutelings, 2000). The second relevant aspect of the Patchwork Metropolis is that was able to hit — with a clear a synthetic language — one of the crucial aspects to understand the process that has guided the Dutch urbanisation. At least from the fifties, what have been designed and produced in the Netherlands are mainly patches. Therefore the history of the Dutch planning can be explained as the story of the creation of different patches and the art to arrange them into the multi-coloured patchwork displayed by Neutelings.

The third point, connected with the previous one, is that the patchwork soon became a very influential figure and a reference point for a generation of young architects and public servants accustomed to see the Dutch urbanisation as a series of dense urban centres displaced into a rural land. Indeed Neutelings was one of the first to display the more complex condition of the Dutch territory overcoming one of the dogmas that have guided — and apparently is still guiding — the official planning practice. This point is testified by the fact that even in 2014 — 25 years after its development — one of the atelier of the IABR 2014³¹ was entitled 'Tapijtmetropool' quoting and explicitly referring to the 1989 project.

"Neutelings manages to approach the task he is set with an open mind. He accepts the social, economic and physical limits and within them establish his own margins." (Rodermond et als., 1991) This passage of the Maaskant's prize jury report subsumed the last reason, maybe the most relevant, to study the Patchwork Metropolis today. The Netherlands during the late eighties faced a process of important shifts, passing from being one of the most planned (Dutt and Costa, 1985) and one of the most advance welfare state of Europe to a neoliberal and market oriented country. Even if this passage was not as dramatic as other realities, the results are visible in the nowadays' planning infrastructure and in the territorial configuration. Within this context, Neutelings started to embrace the underlying premises of neoliberalism, defining the scale and the procedure at which the urbanisation would take place, not only in the Netherlands.

According to what just stated it is possible to pose a final hypothesis. If it is true that the neoliberalism is a global phenomena and that large part of the planning discussion is still attached to the concept of the compact city — in which the last piece of open territory can be sacrificed for the sake of a sustainable and compact new development — it is possible to conclude that the parts of cities and territories that we are building today³² — at least in Europe — can be can be interpreted as new patches and that The Netherlands — due to various geographic, historical and planning reasons — appeared in 1989 just few steps ahead in this process.

Should the patchwork then be interpreted as a paradigm, as a sophisticated and coherent system of thinking? The answer to this question should be no, or not yet. The author was lucidly able to depict a changing process that invested the urban practice in between the end of the XX and the beginning of the XXI centuries and he did nothing more than to develop this simple intuition to its extreme consequence avoiding any moralistic outlet. Here two different research directions can be opened. From one side the studies of the 'Metropolitan archipelagos'³³ and 'large scale urban projects'³⁴ are becoming always more popular in the European scientific literature fostering the research of the process and dimension of the neoliberal urbanism of which Neutelings should be identified as a pioneer. From the other the already mentioned connection between the patchwork and the landscape ecology can offer the possibility to implement the structure depicted by Neutelings paving the way to a more complete and sophisticated urban paradigm.

³¹ I am referring to the IABR Project Atelier BrabantStad, set up in 2013 by the IABR in alliance with the Province of North Brabant, BrabantStad (the municipalities of 's-Hertogenbosch, Eindhoven, Tilburg, Breda, and Helmond) and the water boards of North Brabant, to look for the opportunities that lie hidden in Brabant's urban tapestry. The design research was carried out by Architecture Workroom Brussels, Floris Alkemade Architect and LOLA Landscape Architects.

³² Actually after the financial crises of 2008 the neoliberal thinking has been openly and strongly criticised and the process of large urban project has been subjected to a remarkable slowdown. However at the moment the creation of new patches seems to the author still a very relevant practice of urbanisation in the European reality.

³³ See Indovina, F., 2009. *Dalla città diffusa all'arcipelago metropolitano*. Milano: Franco Angeli

³⁴ See Carmona, M., 2009. *Planning through Projects: Moving from Master Planning to Strategic Planning - 30 Cities*. Amsterdam: Techne Press.

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