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Drawing time

The representation of change and dynamics in Dutch landscape architectural practice after 1985

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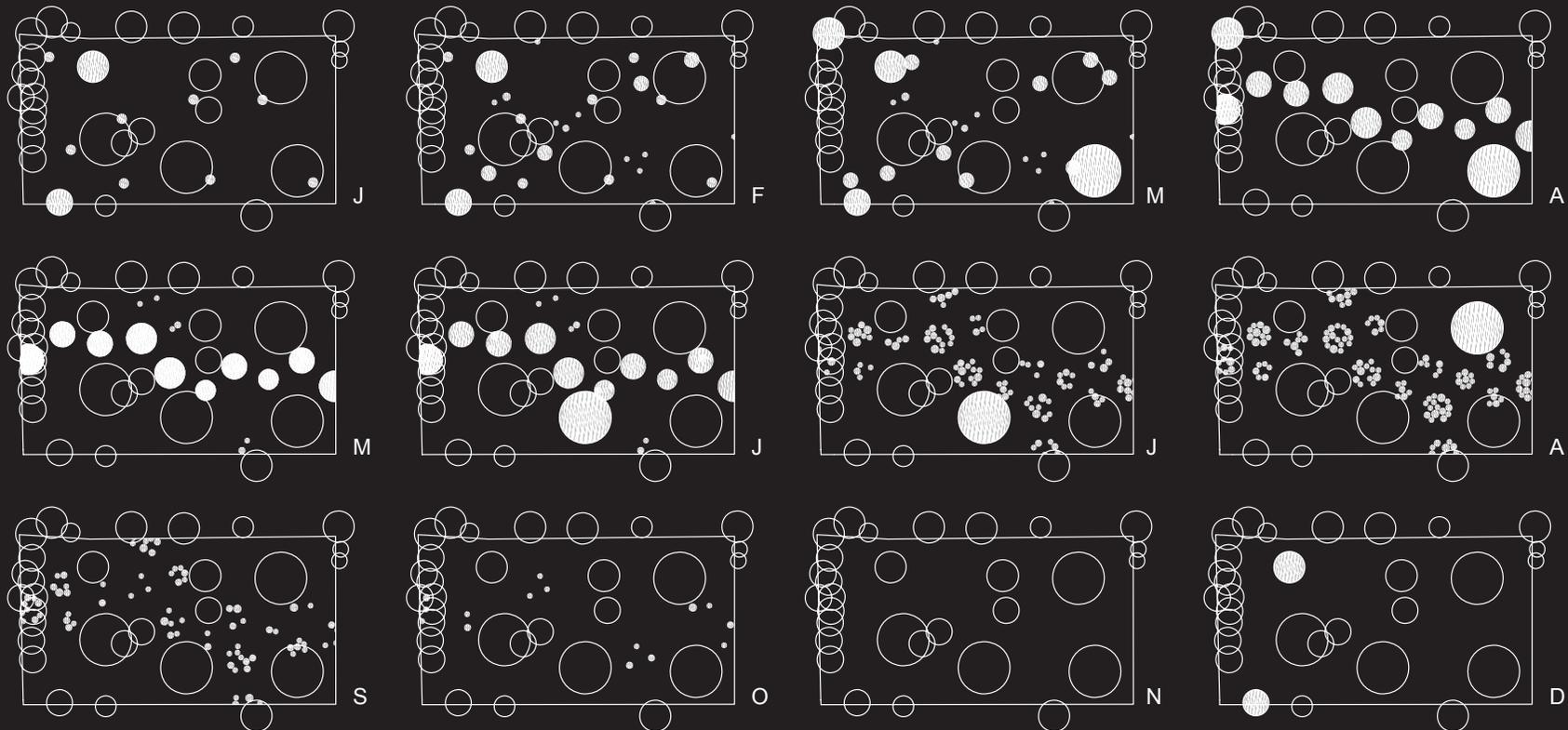
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Drawing Time

The representation of growth, change and dynamics
in Dutch landscape architectural practice after 1985

Noël van Dooren



DRAWING TIME

THE REPRESENTATION OF CHANGE AND DYNAMICS IN DUTCH LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE AFTER 1985

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

**ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. ir. K. I. J. Maex**

**ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Aula der Universiteit
op vrijdag 3 maart 2017, te 13.00 uur
door Noël van Dooren
geboren te Ewijk**

Promotiecommissie:

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Faculteit: Geesteswetenschappen

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Cover: *Lace Garden*, Amsterdam, realized, 2009

Preface

Some fifteen years ago, I co-authored a book on the Dutch landscape architect Alle Hosper, who died, far too early, in 1997. One chapter I particularly enjoyed writing gave an overview of how his ways of drawing had evolved over thirty years - a stunning evolution. This further stimulated my interest in the drawing as an artefact, independent of the park or public space represented in it. From 2004 to 2009, as head of the landscape architecture department of the Academy of Architecture Amsterdam, I developed, with my colleague Harma Horlings, a lecture series on design methods. In this series we tried to stay as close as possible to the actual design process in the studio, for example in discussing drawings made by the students. One of my questions was: Can students help their own design process by being precise in how to draw, when to draw and what to draw? At this same academy, choreographer Krisztina de Chatel was the artist in residence in 2006-2007. A choreographer may be understood to be an artist that designs a performance. If such performances are preceded by drawings, are these drawings comparable to the representations normally used in landscape architecture? And if that is the case, how then can dance as an act in space and time be drawn? Our vibrant discussions on the role of drawings in dance, and an understanding of drawings as notations, influenced this study substantially.

When, in 2009, I was offered the chance to do PhD research as research fellow of the Amsterdam School of Arts, of which the Academy of Architecture is part, the three experiences described above were my inspiration for looking in a very specific way at my own profession, landscape architecture. In my professional practice, starting at the office of H+N+S landschapsarchitecten in the early nineties, I experienced how much patience is needed,

in many ways, to arrive at a mature landscape. Dealing often with designs in which water had to be addressed, for example in the form of large water catchment basis in the German river Emscher, I was confronted with the dynamics of landscape and its different performance over time. How should this be conveyed to the client and the public? More important, is it possible for a designer to get a grip on that changing landscape? This professional background and the essential experiences as described led to my interest in the role of drawings in exploring this very typical aspect of landscape: its slow yet sometimes very quick, expected and unexpected, regular and irregular change over time. This interest was very practical, as it related directly to my own profession, but also to my teaching at the Academy. It was also an interest of a theoretical nature, as I felt there were inconsistencies on a theoretical level. Drawings, in general, and also my own drawings, did not seem to engage in this issue of time that is so evident in landscape.

In 2008 landscape historian Prof. Erik de Jong presented *Landscapes of the Imagination*, offering an overview of 400 years of drawing in landscape architecture, and an analysis of how to read these drawings. Here, I recognized a vocabulary that would facilitate discussions on drawings per se, and I am very glad Erik de Jong was willing to supervise this research. Formally, as a dissertation, this work is affiliated to the Humanities department of the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Even though the University of Amsterdam does not include a landscape architecture department, the environment proved to be relevant, not only because De Jong's chair explores the relationship between culture, landscape and nature, but also because a focus on the drawing as an object fits into an art history perspective. Furthermore, thinking about drawings as

images, their meaning and their dissemination is typically a topic for cultural studies and media studies. Pondering the very nature of a drawing and its relation to reality, we enter the domain of philosophy. To conclude, interviewing my fellow colleagues for their considerations on drawing and time, led me to use ethnographic research techniques.

My years at H+N+S landschapsarchitecten were very formative for developing an interest in a very Dutch approach to landscape and landscape architecture - a physical as well as a cultural condition. The office celebrated its 25 years of existence in 2015, and I was delighted to be able to write an essay titled *Gardening the delta. A Dutch approach to landscape architecture*. There is a fascinating tension between an on-going globalization in which landscape design produces the same products all over the world and a stubborn regional identity. This study dives deeply into that typically Dutch answer and acknowledges at the same time that the question of how to represent time in drawings is by no means exclusively Dutch. For that reason, I appreciated Prof. Udo Weilacher, Technische Universität München, accepting the invitation to become co-supervisor and to provide an international perspective.

I decided to study the issue of time, landscape and its representation in a theoretical mode, but also in and via practice. Leaders of offices were interviewed in long but inspiring sessions and huge numbers of drawings were collected as 'evidence'. The practical side also involved the Academy of Architecture. Students cooperated in design experiments, and in that sense the research was also explorative. This provided me with a wide array of answers and drawings to the question of the role time plays in current

landscape architecture and how it is represented, or could be represented. Looking back, it gave a kaleidoscopic image of a young, developing profession with competing interests. Landscape architecture is a creative practice with a rather high degree of idealism, but at the same time economic units called offices usually form the basis of its organization. Drawing is done within constraints, such as deadlines and budgets. The issue of time in landscape confronts landscape architects with the limits of representational conventions. Stepping over these borders needs dedication, and in daily life clients do not ask for this. Therefore, innovation should come from the profession itself. By performing this research I hope to stimulate this innovation. I wish to give an insight into how landscape architects of today think about their profession, representation, time and landscape. The awareness of these related issues is timely and I hope the material I present here will contribute to a fruitful debate amongst practitioners, students and theoreticians.

Today six years later, I am extremely happy that although it was hard work, I never lost my love and dedication for the particular subject. As it was also exhausting, for me but certainly also for my loved ones, it is now time to finalize this study. However, as in landscape, there is growth and decay, but it never stops. In this case, I guess my professional life will not last long enough to engage in all the fascinating questions I could not answer here. But I certainly will continue trying to answer them in view of my fascination and my conviction that this work contributes to landscape architecture, a profession that is relevant to our world today.

Utrecht, November 2016

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