Between the World Wars, the talent of Dutch town planner J. M. de Casseres (1902–1990) found expression in two visionary books and a clutch of influential articles. In an in-depth article published in February 1929 in the magazine De Gids under the title ‘Grondslagen der planologie’ (‘Principles of planology’) he invented a term for the new social-scientific discipline that would eventually enter the Dutch language.

De Casseres made it his life’s work to elevate the art and craft of town planning to academic status, classifying the international planning body of knowledge and making it accessible and applicable. The results of this internationally supported body of knowledge are reflected not only in De Casseres’ publications but also in a string of urban design proposals for towns across the Netherlands.

This re-publication of the De Gids article, alongside five other influential De Casseres articles in translation and their original Dutch language form, brings this key thinker within reach of a wider research audience.
The *Studies in International Planning History* series brings back to print influential texts from around the world about the study and practice of city and regional planning. The aim is to make material that is now difficult or impossible to obtain more widely available for scholars of urban planning history. Each book is a facsimile of the original work, with an introductory essay written by an expert in the field putting the text into its contemporary and current context.

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INTRODUCTION
Shaping the future by scientific reform

Koos Bosma

The Dutch planologist Joël Meijer de Casseres (1902–1990, Figure 1) had the ambition to be recognized as a scientist, in particular as a pioneer of planning and as a theorist of communication. He believed that society could be engineered by the planning of habitable space. A widely read man, his erudition was at the core of the message he proclaimed throughout his life: the indispensability of the cultivated expert who was committed to social reform.

As a young man of exceptional promise, De Casseres was cosseted and adulated by his parents. Growing up in a Jewish family in the small town of Beverwijk, he faced

Figure 1 Joël Meijer de Casseres in his twenties (Het Nieuwe Instituut Archive, Rotterdam)
the classic dilemma of whether to keep faith with his ancestral traditions or to assimilate. He did not deny his Jewish roots and supported Zionism, but wanted little to do with the bourgeois outlook and marginalization of the local Jewish community. He sought, rather, his contacts and recognition in left-wing circles.

Despite his talents, he suffered from an inferiority complex which he tried to assuage by devoting himself to a fanatical study of the written word. Among his most productive qualities were an exceptional intelligence, an ascetic lifestyle and the disciplined absorption of knowledge. But these were accompanied by traits that generally worked to his disadvantage, especially in the Dutch culture of the period. He was quick to speak his mind, oversensitive, parsimonious, tactless, biting in his criticism, shrewd, fiercely idealistic and manically single-minded. In his professional life, this cocktail of idiosyncrasies, together with his rejection of the norms and values of the circles in which he moved, would make him an outsider with a reputation for being difficult to deal with. His irritation at the shortcomings of those around him was intense, especially if they thwarted him in the pursuit of his ideals.

De Casseres was a social reformer at heart. His avid idealism was not unusual amid the many reformist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. A social reformer is one who espouses a programme untainted by the ills of the contemporary situation, and projects it onto the future. The rhetorical presentation of an idealized outcome is meant to appeal to the imagination and taste of the public. But, consciously or unconsciously, the reformer ignores the irrational aspect of human nature. While decrying the irrationality of contemporary society, his own idealistic positivism rests on fictional assumptions, such as the power of reason and science, to transform people and society.

Irrationality was inimical to the Enlightenment belief in progress that still prevailed in pre-World War II modernist thinking. The ideal of modernism was to emancipate mankind from the murky ignorance of the past. But the transparent lifestyle, pared down to its rational essence, would only be possible in a reformed society. And that, the modernist reformers held, was something that could be achieved by social engineering, conducted with the industrial efficiency of the assembly line. There was no room in this outlook for the fictions that made daily life bearable. The modernist optimism of the period developed into a reductive, functionalist concept, imbued with total confidence in the plasticity of the individual and the power of social engineering.

In twentieth-century town planning, technical, scientific and planning knowledge were thoroughly interwoven with the same kind of social idealism as that of modernists in general. But the power of planners to intervene in the physical environment persuaded many of them that their ideals could be realized, not just in some distant future but in the here and now. Professional town planners saw their rational, well-informed, spatial interventions as clearing the way for a more general societal planning process; they were trailblazers of the new reality. The reformer’s critique of the existing society seemed irresistible when dressed up in the detailed, realistic-looking images made by artists, architects and town planners.

From architect to planologist

From 1919 to 1922, De Casseres studied architecture at the Hoge School voor Bouwkunst en Sierende Kunsten [High School for Architecture and Decorative Arts] in Haarlem. After graduation his career forged ahead, taking on an international dimension that was
unusual in town planning circles in those years. His further studies in Dresden, London and Paris concentrated on two themes. First, he wanted to widen the concept of town planning from its interpretation as an art form, as ‘architecture writ large’, into a serious science for which he coined the term ‘planology’. Second, he wanted this new discipline to be founded on a body of knowledge which was not only technical in nature but also embraced the relatively young human sciences. His subsequent lectures, articles and books on planology would be full of references to publications in history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis, architecture, landscape gardening and literature.

During a stay in Dresden in 1923, De Casseres absorbed essential insights from the work of the pioneer sociologists Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Ludwig Stein (1859–1930). Simmel had conducted research into societal phenomena such as groups, class differences, marriage, property, language, law and religion – in other words, the organization and reorganization of society in all its aspects. In Simmel, De Casseres found a lucidly formulated sociological interpretation of habitable space as a psychological experience of boundedness, distance, fixity, vicinity and similar qualities. Simmel argued, for example, that space is not confined by geographical or administrative boundaries but propagates ‘over the whole country in mental, economic and political waves.’ On the concept of the boundary Simmel wrote, ‘The boundary is not a spatial fact but a sociological fact that takes a spatial form.’ He used methods of historical comparison and empirical deduction to trace the origins of spatial phenomena. The methodology was based on two distinct models of historical evolution: a steady, linear process and a rhythmic or cyclic process. The natural sciences, especially biology, investigated the fundamental qualities of mankind that persisted unchanged in the linear evolution from primitive tribes to metropolitan masses. Groups, tribes, clans and classes were characterized by a steady rhythm, the cyclic aspect of which manifested itself as typical, recurrent series of events and transformations (such as war, epidemics etc.)

Ludwig Stein applied the physical concepts of statics and dynamics to sociology. Whereas statics related to the structure of society and its constituent elements, dynamics concerned the forces acting on and within that society. The spatial coexistence of distinct social categories, with different functions and characteristics, could be classified as a static phenomenon. A specific community, as expressed in its language, morals and laws, could effectively be frozen at a given point in time and studied with the aid of static social research techniques; in other words, the sociologist could take an empirical, descriptive cross-section. A second, dynamic, study of the gathered data, resulting in a developmental history, could only be made after completion of a thorough static study. The dynamic analysis of the past in terms of developmental ‘laws’ enabled the sociologist to extrapolate his data to the future: ‘looking backwards, pure causal regularities, looking forwards, completely regular tendencies’.

These sociological studies formed De Casseres’ view of society as a system of complex relations, and of the state as a politico-economic community of interests. They provided a societal basis for his ideas on spatial planning, and in turn helped him construct his own social and spatial taxonomies.

On moving to London in 1924, De Casseres made acquaintance with town planning in the United Kingdom. He studied during this period at the Town Planning Institute under Patrick Abercrombie (1879–1957). Abercrombie was a keen proponent of the ideas of Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) and incorporated them into his teaching. Geddes had started his career as a biologist, and became convinced that the principles of biological
evolution could be applied equally to society. The core components of his sociological model, summed up as ‘place, work, folk’, had direct applications to urban planning. In particular, he championed the use of civic surveys to gather data on the physical, economic and social aspects not just of a city but the region as a whole. The duality of statics and dynamics was also present in this survey method, but in much more concrete terms than Stein’s. Besides the static aspects such as topography and geology, a dynamic study of the history of the city and region was an essential precursor to urban planning.

During this period, De Casseres met the leading figures of the Garden City Movement – Thomas Adams, Ewart Culpin, Patrick Geddes, Henry Vaughan Lanchester, Thomas Mawson, George Pepler, Charles Benjamin Purdom, Inigo Triggs and Raymond Unwin – and studied their published writings. From them, he learned the social dimension of British town planning. He absorbed the three urban growth models cultivated in the UK: the garden village, the garden suburb and, at the highest scale level, the garden city. De Casseres became an active proponent of the use of regional surveys. After a successful conclusion of the course, De Casseres was admitted to the Town Planning Institute as an Associate Member in 1924. Henceforth he could consider himself a well-trained planning specialist.

From September 1924 until the latter half of 1925, De Casseres made Paris his home. The City of Light was in his view an unnatural, exhausting biotope to live in, but rich in splendid boulevards for the flaneur and blessed with an exciting theatre scene. He studied at the École de Hautes Études Urbaines where the leading urbanists of the period taught, inspired by the reformist Musée Social which fully supported Geddes’ survey ideas. While following courses at the École, De Casseres visited the city’s planning department (founded in 1920) and gained experience in conducting surveys, making zoning plans and traffic planning. He also studied the work of the French geographers Brunhes, Gallois and Vidal de la Blache, and the German geographer Ratzel. French sociology, especially the work of Gustave le Bon, was also of considerable interest to him.

De Casseres, a man with a mission

De Casseres summed up the results of his studies in Dresden, London and Paris in his first book, Stedebouw (1926) which included a preface by Abercrombie. Part of the book is based on his article in the Journal of the Town Planning Institute, ‘Some Notes on Dutch Town Planning: A Sociological Study’ (1924; see p. 1).

He was then 24 and his early success was in no small way due to this book. He was a passionate believer in the eventual triumph of reason over irrationality, but his concept of rationality was a highly reductionist, indeed essentialist, one: language had to be unambiguous and transparent, a reflection of ‘pure’ thinking. With this in mind, he headed the first chapter of Stedebouw with a quote from Immanuel Kant to the effect that someone who has toiled long to erect a tower of theory will eventually have to dismantle it again to check the soundness of its foundations. He took this as a mandate to lay the foundations for a science of planology by immediately defining his own basic concepts, accompanied by a plea for lucid terminology. In the book, he set out a comprehensive conception of the discipline of planology, culminating in a visionary ambition:

A further extension of interregional cooperation, which is an expected outcome of developing regional urbanism, is collaboration within a national organization
charged with the task of drawing up a national survey and plan, which may be followed in turn by an international planning collaboration through which urbanism will find its most beautiful and, for mankind, happiest expression.

De Casseres elaborated this idea in further detail in his article ‘Grondslagen der planologie’ or ‘The Principles of Planology’ (see pp. 36–79), which was published in the cultural periodical De Gids in 1929. The scale of his conception was now unmistakable, for the territorial domain of planology was to be ‘the whole earth’. It would be merely a step of scale from the national plan to an international one. Such a world plan would guarantee a rational use of the Earth’s surface. ‘Let the League of Nations have the noble task of performing this work and of actively demonstrating to the non-diplomat, by this constructive deed, its necessity!’

The consequences of the expanded task description implicit in the term planology were far from trivial. Utilitarian and functional considerations would have to take precedence over the aesthetic aspirations associated with the older term ‘town planning’. The programme and the design principles of civic planning must, moreover, have a scientific basis. This meant putting an end to urban planning as an extension of architectural design. The acquisition of objective information, such as maps based on aerial photography, as a basis for formulating plans would usurp artistic intuition and the will-to-form. De Casseres clearly saw the benefits of modern air flight, especially the importance of air photography for area mapping and as a tool for town planning work. The importance he attached to accurate cartography is evident from his later article on the subject – ‘Stedebouw en kaartenwetenschap’ or ‘Town Planning and Scientific Cartography’ (1927) – reproduced in this book (see pp. 14–35). The planological method of scientifically conducted surveys of farming, industry, housing, employment, traffic and recreation would reduce the role of aesthetics to ‘normal’ proportions and supply civic planning with many more substantive components, such as road building. The road network was in fact a subject that occupied De Casseres, as illustrated by the article ‘Het Rijkswegenplan’ or ‘The National Highways Plan’ he wrote about the first National Highways Plan in 1927 (see pp. 7–13). This plan was a very early species of national infrastructural planning in the Netherlands. De Casseres appreciated the basic idea of a national highway plan, but criticized, in a harsh manner (illustrating his flamboyant character), the purely technical and juridical approach, while the role of the town planning expert was denied.

The gulf left by the elimination of ‘architecture writ large’ was to be filled, according to De Casseres, by sociology, geography and the combination of the two, sociography: the ‘description of society, especially the description of space-related social phenomena’. Sociology, he argued, ought to aim primarily at studying the influences of politics, economics and culture on individuals and groups within society. For planology, it was especially interesting to know how relationships of land ownership and industrial or agricultural production affect living, working, transport and recreation. De Casseres warned against dilettantism and against taking prejudiced ideological standpoints in the sociological or sociographical studies, which would rob such research of all value. A sociography of the Netherlands was necessary because a descriptive analysis had to precede a national plan. In the course of the 1930s, incidentally, De Casseres noted a growing discrepancy between the knowledge supplied by the survey and the formulated plan, which was meant to be a synthesis of that knowledge with the creative design.
The surveys were generally becoming little more than a literary exercise leading to the production of an attractive publication, while their actual purpose – supplying basic components of the plan – was being neglected. On the other hand, he had much confidence in public opinion polling, which was becoming a widespread practice in the US and the UK during the 1930s. It would, in his view, give new input to the survey.6

The book Het andere Amerika (‘The Other America’, 1939), which evaluated the impact of Roosevelt’s New Deal and the benefits of a planned society, was a bestseller for De Casseres. It received good reviews, especially in the left-wing media, and marked a high point in De Casseres’ theoretical reflections. He saw the New Deal as a realization of his ideal planned society.

What seemed like an epidemic of social engineering in the 1930s had the effect that planology slowly gained recognition as a social science. The growing interest in it was connected with the rise of various forms of national and even continental-scale multi-year planning in totalitarian states such as the USSR, Nazi Germany and Italy, as well as the planned society implicit in America’s New Deal, which De Casseres greatly admired. The terminology he created was eagerly adopted in Dutch-language political circles by the end of the 1930s, mainly due to revived calls for a national plan and a national planning agency. Planology became a widely used term in Flanders and the Dutch East Indies as well as in the Netherlands. But the outbreak of World War II thwarted the growth of any form of social or spatial planning in the Netherlands. On the contrary, it had become all too clear to De Casseres, in the run-up to the war, how the totalitarian threat from Germany, and especially the bombardment of cities in Spain, had major consequences for planological concepts and design, as is apparent from his article on ‘Luchtbescherming en stedebouw’ or ‘Air-raid Protection and Town Planning’ (1939) (see pp. 14–35). This well-informed article explained the various threads to the city, the measures to be taken and its impact on town planning.

The impact of De Casseres’ internationally accumulated knowledge is evident not only in his publications cited above, but also in their influence on a succession of designs in the Netherlands. A combination of urban growth models – the garden city and the linear city – appeared in a plan for developing the municipality of Wijk aan Zee en Duin (1924, Figure 2) as a satellite of Amsterdam for 60,000 inhabitants and 40,000 bathing guests. There was, furthermore, a regional plan for the controlled growth of Eindhoven (1929–1930, Figure 3) and district plans for parts of the province of Noord-Brabant (1930–1939, Figure 4) including some hundred municipal extension plans coordinated at regional level, Figure 5.

In 1929, De Casseres took up employment with the municipality of Eindhoven and was entrusted with the task of designing a general extension plan for the rapidly growing city. Eindhoven was a boom town, growing from a population of 45,000 in 1920 to over 100,000 a decade later. By far the largest employer in the city was the Philips factory for incandescent lamps and radio valves. The town’s original inhabitants and, even more, the Catholic clergy regarded the company’s dominant influence in the city as an unholy abomination. De Casseres completed an outline plan very quickly. It comprised a radially organized growth pattern that would integrate existing village structures into a series of concentric rings. The flexible extension plan specified certain important features: the location of residential districts, roads and waterways, the restriction of the expanding city by an orbital girdle, and open spaces as part of the radial
Figure 2 De Casseres, Extension plan for Wijk aan Zee en Duin, 1927. A satellite city for Amsterdam. Nrs. 1–8 are future garden villages (Het Nieuwe Instituut Archive, Rotterdam)

Figure 3 De Casseres, General extension plan for Eindhoven, 1929–1930. Dark central region: existing city, Large outer circle: airfield Welschap (Het Nieuwe Instituut Archive, Rotterdam)
Figure 4 De Casseres, General extension plan for Eindhoven with the extension plans for the surrounding satellite villages (Het Nieuwe Instituut Archive, Rotterdam)

Figure 5 De Casseres, Regional plan for south-east Noord-Brabant, 1931 (Het Nieuwe Instituut Archive, Rotterdam)
greenery system. Radial traffic routes doubled as a component of that system: wide green strips separated through traffic from the residential and parallel road traffic. Secondary green strips were to vein the city fabric so organically that every city dweller would be able to reach green space within minutes. De Casseres specified the locations of several cemeteries to replace old parochial burial grounds, as well as the location of a new airfield close to the residence of the industrialist Frits Philips. A ministerial decision determined that the airfield would be built as part of a job creation programme.

Although De Casseres did not experiment with parallel block housing, he dispensed with the church-centred neighbourhood structure associated with the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic parishes of the Eindhoven region. The partial extension plans were arranged to position the new residential areas within easy reach of industry sites. The economic slump of the early 1930s precluded full implementation of the De Casseres plan, and those parts which were built largely took the form of job creation projects. Problems concerning the north–south traffic connection and the arbitrary relative locations of industrial complexes, the canal and its harbour, remained unresolved in De Casseres’ design as it had in earlier extension plans for Eindhoven. These issues were insoluble without a fundamental change in the power relationships in the municipal government. The conditions for a radical approach arose only during World War II, following allied bombardment of the inner city and the Philips buildings.

While De Casseres worked on Eindhoven’s General Extension Plan from 1929 to 1931, he also undertook the design of extension plans for nearby villages on behalf of the respective municipalities, as well as a regional plan for the south-eastern part of Noord-Brabant with Eindhoven as its nucleus. The regional plan proposed an infrastructure which would promote the industrialization of Eindhoven, thereby transferring the labour surplus from the villages to the industrial areas. De Casseres treated the villages as satellite towns of the booming city of Eindhoven, while the regional plan was to function as a guideline and a decision framework for the municipal extension plans. The three structuring elements of the regional plan were the transport system, the satellites with their potential growth limits, and the conservation of country estates, forests and heaths. The regional plan was initially a form of voluntary cooperation between municipalities located within the region, and lacked its own legislative basis. Eventually the planning area was amalgamated in September 1932 into a larger regional plan – called De Meyerij – jointly with the cities of ’s-Hertogenbosch and Tilburg, on the basis of the Housing Act amendment of 1931, which regulated the voluntary collaboration between municipalities intending to draw up a regional plan. The area involved included some 75 municipalities with a total population of approximately 400,000. De Casseres was promoted in 1933 to the directorship of a special Technical Department for Regional Planning, which was charged not only with implementing the regional plan but also the drawing up of many municipal extension plans, so as to produce a ‘complete harmony’ between the regional plan and individual municipal extension plans with regard to land use, public housing, natural greenery and traffic. The Technical Department combined the trio of regional planning, municipal extension planning and aesthetic supervision into a single body. Construction outside the urban areas could also be supervised. Population policies, land use, infrastructure, nature conservation, rural housing and landscape planning could now in principle be comprised within a single, overarching plan. The most controversial reform was De Casseres’ scheme for the development of an industrial town centred around a Bata Shoe Factory in the vicinity of Eindhoven.
(1934–1938, Figure 6). It precipitated a clash with the Catholic establishment that resulted in his dismissal.

**Planology as communication**

De Casseres was fascinated throughout his life by the complex role of language and images in human communication. Aware though he was of its shortcomings, language offered him nonetheless the sole way towards a better society. He was captivated at an early age by John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (London 1689). Defining philosophy as the ‘true knowledge of things’, Locke argued that improvement of the human condition could be achieved by logical, rational means. This was the route that De Casseres also chose.

He made acquaintance in the course of the 1920s with the protagonists of the Dutch Significs movement (and later with the Vienna Circle which formed around Ludwig Wittgenstein and Otto Neurath). Significs referred to a science of mental communication which aspired to transparent thought and unambiguous language. Significs, a term introduced by the aristocratic English philosopher Victoria Welby, was permeated with somewhat heterogeneous ideas about social reform and ethical motives. Petitions for a better relationship between individuals, classes and nations spread through Europe like a virus around the turn of the century. The specific demands ranged from pacifism to ‘transparent’ communication through language. Lady Welby’s programme of Significs had three mainstays. First, she argued for a study of the *significance* of verbal signs alongside the interpretation of these signs by the listener. Second, she criticized the inadequate understanding of communication processes and the consequent poor use of
language. Third, she formulated pedagogic and reformative social objectives which, through an improved system of signs instilled into young children by upbringing and schooling, would bring about fundamental improvements in interpersonal communication. Her explanation of Significs took the form of a reflection on the acquired, communicated and ever-changing relations between signs and meaning, between speaker and listener, between different categories of knowledge (memories, expectations, emotions etc.) and between processes of socialization.

Irritation with the common ambiguity of language emerges clearly from the writings of De Casseres. He made an impassioned appeal for a rational, scientific view of language as a vehicle of communication, and for its development into a pure semantic system of rational messages. It was precisely the degradation and ‘abuse’ of language that was revealed by sociologists, psychologists and psychoanalysts. Freud regularly appears in De Casseres’ writing as an archaeologist of the mind who studied the history of consciousness; Freud was not concerned with facts, but with the experienced life-events and subjective feelings of the patient under analysis which were objectivized by the analyst. De Casseres felt no inclination, however, to analyse the unconscious motives behind his own behaviour. He persevered in his rationalizing and in constructing abstract scientific explanations. After all, Freud himself held the rationality of his theories paramount. De Casseres defended himself against the irrationality of others by branding it as stupid prejudice, mindless mass behaviour or anti-Semitism. It was his aversion to self-analysis, his relative professional isolation and his fervent critique of others that gave De Casseres his reputation as ‘the planologist with the hammer’. In his pursuit of unambiguity and his eagerness to grasp nettles, he spared no feelings when he thought he could distinguish sense from nonsense or truth from falsehood. The dogmatism – or, in the view of some, the very un-Dutch arrogance – with which he expressed his criticism from the standpoint of a guiding expert, masked his inferiority complex and his own repressed feelings.

His preparatory notes for the article ‘The Principles of Planology’ (1929), which date from December 1928, start with ‘Signific part: the word and its influence’. He introduced ‘planology’ as a replacement for confusing terms such as stedebouw (literally city-building) and urbanism, both of which confusingly implied a limitation of scale to that of the city even when something of wider scope was intended. He defined planology as the ‘discipline of organizing the spatial system of society’. This neologism had the merit of lacking any suggestion of territorial constraint:

The National Plan derives its significance not only from the factual promulgation of general guidelines for spatial developments of the national community; but it can also be a powerful factor for demonstrating to the nation that, however great the psychological and religious differences may be in a country, they cannot destroy the considerable unity pursued by the National Plan. (...) The National Plan will open the eyes of hundreds of thousands who are tied to a narrow-minded and misplaced local patriotism, and will open the way to cooperation in all areas of human life.

Planology cut quite a good figure among the new terms which were gaining currency in other countries. The German language was enriched in 1928 by Gustav Langen’s new terms Raumplanung and Raumordnung, Dutch versions of which were also adopted in the Netherlands in the latter half of the 1930s. The French word urbanisme dated from the
same period. In Britain the terms ‘town planning’ and ‘town and country planning’ were used, while in the United States ‘planning’ was generally unqualified and applied equally to town planning and the planned society of the New Deal; all terms with connotations of organizational perfection and efficiency as goals in their own right. The term ‘planning’ could be extended to every domain of human action. ‘Spatial planning’ was merely ‘the provision of the material structure demanded by a predetermined social organization’ (H. V. Lanchester). When transposed to the domain of planology, the rationalization of language would, according to De Casseres, have a cathartic effect: ‘Perhaps planology is destined for the task of restoring the disrupted unity of all forms of human thinking!’

His book Het andere Amerika (1939) includes a comprehensive treatment of semantics. De Casseres revealed his appreciation of the battle against ‘blablitis’, mere empty words. Sociologists such as Henry Alpert, Thurman Arnold and Stuart Chase did well, in his view, by denouncing the vacuous jargon of dignitaries, scientists and the intelligentsia of American society. De Casseres saw combatting this linguistic malaise as a contribution to a well-planned society, in which everyone would be focussed on the community and existing negative human behaviours would prove to be nothing but the consequences of socioeconomic circumstances. The planned society would begin with ‘the semantic rationalization of the mental life of many.’ He was well aware, moreover, that people built their own verbal empires as a way of disguising the message. The effect of words was thus not determined by their content but by the way they were used. De Casseres pointed to the task of education in this respect, quoting approvingly from James Harvey Robinson’s The Mind in the Making (New York 1921): ‘Young people must learn early on that language is alas not primarily a means of conveying thoughts and information, but a means of expressing emotions, similar to the braying, roaring and grunting of animals.’

Various academics who reviewed De Casseres’ book noted that the author observed, stated and described, but did not analyse or explain; that the book was a clever combination of a travelogue and a fallen-over bookcase; that the expert De Casseres was too emotional a figure for objective science, but too intelligent and critical for populism. All his pre-war writings were characterized by idealism, passionate argumentation, international comparisons and abundant citations of expert sources. A letter De Casseres received from a certain Sies W. Numan on the brink of World War II was illustrative in that respect. He saw the primary quality of Het andere Amerika as being that it stimulated the reader to think, but the facts presented were inadequately checked (‘no doubt a result of a quick and flying trip where you can only have a birdseye view’). The resulting impression was of a ‘not too critical mind’. The countless citations of authorities amplified that idea:

I found it a damn irritation that you are quoting that old hag Odette Keun about nineteen times! If I wouldn’t know better I should say there must be something between you two! I think that woman produces about the dullest reading I have read in ten years.

Planologist in exile

Although De Casseres retained his signifigicant and critical attitude after World War II, his idealistic tone was by then a thing of the past. He led two lives, with the watershed in 1940. In his first life, in which he tried to assimilate but remained an outsider, his exceptional talent was evidenced by two remarkable books and several influential
magazine articles. He furthermore designed extension plans for Eindhoven and regional plans for large parts of the province of Noord-Brabant. His second life started in 1940. During the first few years of the German occupation of Holland, he was able to work in relative visibility and could provide for himself. By 1942, however, the situation had deteriorated and he was forced to go into hiding. Most of his extended family members had perished by the end of the war.

His manuscript Leerboek der planologie (‘Textbook of Planology’, approx. 1,000 pages, 1940–1944) is a summation of his reflections on the international body of knowledge and its territorial classification (urban extension plan, regional plan, national plan and international plan), its division between the survey and plan design, and its further categorization according to specific domains of planology: agriculture, industry, commerce, transport, housing, military and landscape. The textbook was never published.

The pre-war idiosyncrasies of De Casseres hardened during and after the German occupation into incorrigible defects. It was as though he prolonged the trauma of hiding from the Gestapo by another fifty years through his personality quirks. After the end of the war he led a withdrawn, rather joyless existence as a civil servant in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, where he attempted in vain to introduce his planological outlook. He came little further than preparing public information relating to agriculture (such as an agricultural atlas of the Netherlands). Outside his working life, De Casseres was preoccupied with the newly founded State of Israel and with his active solidarity with the Jewish war survivors.

After retiring in 1968, and under the influence of the work of Karl Popper, he came to the conclusion that language rationalization was, after all, a vain enterprise. He was amazed at himself that he had written in such a compulsive way in his life hitherto, and became convinced that language was above all a barrier, in line with Wittgenstein’s assertion that language disguises thought. He admitted to being a captive of language. When he was not writing, he no longer existed – or indeed ‘I do not write, I am written’. He associated his stream of ideas with the plot of the novel by André Maurois La machine à lire les pensées (1937). Maurois’ mind-reading machine used microphones (‘oreilles mécaniques, parfaites et perforées’) to record a ‘psychogram’ of an individual’s stream of consciousness which could then be replayed on a gramophone. The interior dialogue was not constrained by the will or by external moral corrective mechanisms, and as such stood totally detached from day-to-day reality. Nonetheless, under his bell-jar of ideas and abstractions, De Casseres’ mental life on paper offered him a place of hiding. The gift of using his mind was his lifelong addiction, his highest achievable state of euphoria.

Legacy

The legacy of De Casseres consists of the multi-stage structure of integrated thought and action, the hierarchy of planning scale from large to small: from ‘survey before action’, via design, to execution. ‘Harmony’, ‘rationality’, ‘style’ and ‘ethical values’ are primarily apt to a homogeneous society. The unique coherence of urbanization, recreation policy and nature conservation that characterized the Netherlands in the 1930s, and which De Casseres applied exemplarily in his regional plans for Noord-Brabant, went into a decline after World War II. Planology as a scientific omnivore and a comprehensive design philosophy has become a figure of history.
The significance of the work of the expert De Casseres – making international urban planning’s body of knowledge accessible and applicable – depended first and foremost on his efforts to construct a theoretical system. Not only did he coin the term planology (1929) but he was the first in the Netherlands to formulate its fundamental principles. De Casseres made it his life’s work to scientize craft-based and artistic town planning into a discipline of planology with an academic standing. This dream went unfulfilled until the 1960s when institutes of planology were established at the main Dutch universities. By then, however, the unity of design and research that De Casseres strove for had vanished. He had nurtured an ambition to be the first professor of planology, but the nearest he came to achieving this was a position as privaatsdocent at the University of Utrecht in the latter half of the 1930s.

He was undeniably the most important pre-war theorist and visionary in the field of urban planning. Yet he enjoyed neither the recognition nor the academic standing he believed was his due as the father of planology. The explanation for this is complex. The large-scale systems that characterized his thinking (from city extension plan to world plan), the scientific foundation of planology in which the ‘pen’ (research) and ‘pencil’ (design) remained closely connected, and the impassioned, somewhat pedantic and very undiplomatic tone of his books and articles, made him a controversial figure, even from his early years. Besides, his Jewish origins worked to his disadvantage, as was clearly the case during his pre-war employment in Catholic Noord-Brabant. But perhaps the most important reason was that this adventurous thinker was a fervent reformer.

Notes

1. Simmel, Soziologie, 618.
2. Ibid., 623.
7. Schmitz, De Hollandse signiﬁca, 346.
13. Ibid., 347.

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INTRODUCTION


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Some Notes on Dutch Town Planning

Editorial Note.—In connection with the forthcoming International Town Planning Conference to be held at Amsterdam, Holland, from July 2nd to 9th, Mr. de Casseres (A.M.), who has recently been on a visit to England, has kindly written the following article for the Journal. Mr. de Casseres hopes that what he has to say regarding Town Planning in Holland may be of much interest to his fellow members.

“Town Planning, stripped of all features which are so attractive to the layman and the professional, is in essence as vague for the projector as for the spectator, that often one cannot distinguish between what is abstruse as regards matters of importance and superficialness.”

These words are characteristic of the interpretation to a large number of Dutch architects on this subject. However we must not forget that, to a large extent this opinion is the result of subjective and inaccurate understanding and it ought to be recognised that there is a ground of truth in the above remark.

Modern Town Planning is a complex study of many factors, and it is easy to understand that the layman—here, the architect, as such, is as much a layman as anyone else—loses himself in the multitude of different aspects, which form together the subject, Town Planning.

If we comprehend Town Planning as only the laying-out of streets or the composition of a map for this work (an opinion we still find in many circles) we limit the scope of Town Planning, however important such sub-divisions may be. Happily, people begin—sometimes very dimly—to realise that Town Planning cannot be restricted to the preparation of a plan for some
 streets, and a change in the conception on this field of human activity by many experts and others is observable in recent times. I had the opportunity of stating that in England this favourable alteration is most advanced, and it is in that country that we see the important bearing of this change on the different sides of the Town Planning problem and the further development of this art, which is at the same time a science (a Geisteswissenschaft, as the German word expresses it more exactly).

In Germany and in England, especially in the latter country, great groups begin to understand that Town Planning is not, in the first place, an architectural, but a sociological work, which requires from the expert much more than artistic and architectural qualities. A striking example of these remarks is the composition of the Civic Survey, one of the most important features of modern Town Planning. The preparation of the so-called preliminary report is entirely a sociological investigation. In the same way in the preparation of a regional plan the Town Planner requires a thorough knowledge of sociological methodology, and in the composition of a regional survey and later of the regional scheme the expert has to deal with many problems which are in a very vague relationship or in no relationship at all with architecture.

In this connection it is certain that there is a very great danger in the conception of Town Planning of neglecting the architectural side of the subject, and it is the experience of the author, and many of his colleagues, that many schemes in England, although in other respects excellent projects, lose a great deal by the neglect of the aesthetic and architectural consideration.

From these remarks we see clearly that the Town Planning expert can be an architect, and surely it is desirable that he be one, but we learn also that it would be a very big mistake to say that an architect as such is a Town Planner.

It is this lack of understanding of the true task of Town Planning and the place of architecture in the complexity of factors of Town Planning which is found much more on the Continent than in Britain, and even in Holland it is still very apparent. In this sociological study we have to point out this fact as one of the most important factors in the formation of a very mighty group, which prevents the unfolding of a great Town Planning activity in Holland, and also in other countries. But there are other important factors which cause a typical unfriendly attitude to the Town Planning movement in Holland, and of some of them we wish to give a short account. First there is the Dutch word for Town Planning, which is perhaps best translated as Town Building. In practice the expert realises that there is a very great difference between Town Planning and Town Building, and even in site-planning and site-building, sometimes it seems, really, that there is an infinite distance between plan and realisation. Therefore it is clear that the Dutch word is still worse than the English word. In our times we do not build many towns, and Letchworth and Welwyn are perhaps the only two cities of which one can speak of Town Planning, and of Town Building. The word Town Planning is so far wrong, that there is very seldom an opportunity of real Town Planning, or of planning a region, or an estate or an improvement, and therefore it is very wise, that in England a clear distinction is drawn between Town Planning, Site Planning, Town Improvement, Town Extension and Regional Planning. But as a general indication the word Town Planning is without doubt the best term, and in using it we do understand much better what is meant, than in saying the Dutch word, Stedebouw, the German word, Städtebau, or the French word, Construction des villes. These three words do not tell us anything of the subject, and we can as well speak of Town Building, thinking of the haphazard growth of a factory town, the town "without mercy and without hope," as William Morris said, as we can of the carefully planned Garden City. An American writer pointed out that, properly speaking, a town is always planned, and when we take this word as the indication of the composition, the design, or even a sketch for the laying-out of some streets, he is certainly right in his remark, but we are accustomed to express with Planning—when this word is used in connection with region, site or town—the whole field covered by the preparation of a scheme, from the first sociological enquiry as to history, the growth of the territory, its physical and psychological characteristic, etc., to the final design, and in doing so there is little possibility of confusion, when we speak of Town Planning.

The adverb of the Dutch word for Town Planning, or better for Town Building: "stede- bouwkundig," has an entirely different meaning.
than the substantive, and can be translated as "skilled in Town Building," which is surely a very great skill, and the author would be glad to make the acquaintance of a person, skilled in Town Building.

We conceive the deep meaning of Shakespeare's famous saying, "What is in a word," when we get acquainted with the confusion, originating in the erroneous word "Stedebouw" and its adverb "Stedebouwkundig."

It is not possible here to extend our physiological remarks, but in mentioning that at the side of the Dutch word for Town Building there is another Dutch word, which has again quite a different meaning, although it deals with the same subject, it will be clear to our readers that the results of this "confusion of tongues" is very unfavourable for the development of Town Planning in Holland.

We have to realise that it is very difficult to mark accurately the importance and influence of these and similar factors on this field of human activity, but it is certain that they are of much greater importance than even professionals often realise, and it is the great merit of Siegismund Freud of having shown in a scientific way the wide bearing of this fact.

Of course, there are very material factors in the development of Town Planning, and it is again the genius of Freud who showed that often those apparent material factors are mingled with very immaterial matters which are inseparably bound. One of these is the territory of the country.

However the modern traffic has forwarded the connection of the different countries and nationalities, the national borders remain, and specially during and after the Great War, spiritual borders at the same time. This enclosure, which is in many cases an important limitation, is fortified by another national feature, the unity of tongue, which differs entirely in many of the countries of Europe, under which any of the important nations, England, France, Germany, Holland, and Scandinavia, have an idiom, absolutely different to the others.

The language, the method of understanding of mankind, has a great bearing on the development of any country, and anyone who stays a long time in another country realises that however well he may express himself in the other tongue, it would take him many years to understand the fine differences and profound sense of the foreign language, and even then it is questionable whether it would be possible for a stranger to know the language as if he were born and educated in the country.

And so the tongue of a country is the spiritual union, and at the risk of some misunderstanding we can say with a little variation, on a saying of Mr. Purdom: however varied in our occupations and tastes, however conflicting our opinions, in language we are united. The extent of the territory is then of great importance from the Town Planning point of view, as we find in large countries many large centres of population, which are at the same time as many centres of public and spiritual life. The unity of tongue and the congruity of many interests, make a cooperation between them possible and advantageous. For the development of Town Planning this is of great importance, as those towns which are very often important economical centres can exchange their experience, and this is a great advantage, in matters relating to Town Planning. The experience of one centre in using a particular method can be an example worthy of being imitated by other centres, or if a method fails, a warning to other towns.

It is remarkable to state in this relation that Regional Planning started in two large countries—America and England—and surely in those countries Regional Planning has a more hopeful future than in countries having little territory, as the possibilities of a large territory for this important and new side of Town Planning are much greater than in small entities.

In a small community as Holland these principal advantages are wanting, and this fact, considered together with very difficult local peculiarities, such as density of population, unfavourable geological features, and not the least, religious and political differences, have with the other things referred to above, an important and obstructive influence on a sound development of modern Town Planning in this country, notwithstanding the trouble some people may give themselves to prove the contrary.

In Holland there are two cities which, as to population and economical importance, can be compared with other great centres of Europe. Amsterdam with a population of nearly 800,000 and Rotterdam with nearly 500,000 take a very important place among the great commercial and harbour cities of the world, and both have many features which make them very interesting for the Town Planner.
Both cities are situated on ground below sea level, a peculiar phenomenon only found in very few parts of the world. This situation is of the utmost importance for the whole field of practical Town Planning of these towns. The governments of the cities are obliged to fill up great parts of their territory in an artificial way in order to avoid, in case of the breaking down of the defending dykes, the streets and buildings becoming inundated, such as has happened in Rotterdam at different times. Costly irrigation works have had to be carried out, and continual pumping is necessary to take away the ground water. The condition of the upper part of the soil is so bad that expensive methods of foundations for the erection of buildings must be used, the usual method being to drive wooden piles till the solid ground is reached, and in many cases the piles have a length of 55 feet. These piles are driven under the surface of the groundwater to avoid the putrefaction of the wood. At times, in the case of a low water level, the top of the piles become bare and the process of putrefaction takes place, resulting in the movement of the stone foundations built upon the piles. This often goes further in the walls, damaging the whole building, and becomes a danger to the adjacent houses.

In this way the cost of building is so raised that it is impossible to follow the English housing policy, namely, to avoid many storied buildings for housing purposes, a policy of which the Ministry of Health of England said in a recent publication: "It must be borne in mind that such (many-storied) dwellings are opposed to the habits and traditions of our people, and that they are condemned by the best housing experts. This advantage (viz., the customary means of housing in self-contained cottages in England) should be maintained, and this will be the normal policy of the Ministry."

The result of these conditions is that the greater part of the population of these Dutch towns live in tenement dwellings with all the unpleasant features connected with this way of housing.

However much Amsterdam and Rotterdam miss the presence of fine surroundings which make life in many of the German towns so pleasant, they have another feature of very typical charm, that is the water.

One must have seen those towns, and especially Amsterdam, to feel the importance of this element in the appearance of the city, and the fame of Amsterdam, as one of the finest towns of Europe, is due to the canals, and has given it the name of the "Venice of the North."

In studying both cities we see very soon the great spiritual differences which have an important bearing on the characteristics of each. Rotterdam is a commercial centre "a ou trance" and the whole life of this town bears the typical features of this state. In comparison with the general high level of spiritual life in Holland, Rotterdam is under this level, and the "low standard of ideas, habits and emotions" as an English author found characteristic in the great English towns, can perhaps with a certain right be repeated in speaking of this great harbour. A striking example of the very peculiar taste of this town is the new municipal building which, in a land with such a highly developed architecture as Holland, undoubtedly possesses a very unpleasant impression.

The greater importance of Amsterdam from a spiritual point of view is the result of its history, whereas Rotterdam is entirely the result of the "industrial revolution" of the Continent, and more specially of the industrial growth of Germany after the war of 1870. Amsterdam was the Dutch capital in the days of the Spanish invaders, and later it was the capital of the Dutch republic. Here was the residence of the "Oost-Indische Compagnie," which had ships on all the seas and possessions in nearly every part of the world, it was this company which founded "New Amsterdam," the later New York, and it was due to her activity that Holland of the seventeenth century "ruled the waves" and was one of the mightiest countries of the world. But not only was Amsterdam the prosperous commercial city, it was at the same time the town where art and science found their great representatives; painters as Rembrandt, and poets as Vondel, and so many other great artists lived and worked in the city, that the genius of Spinoza attributed to the fame of Amsterdam as "the established residence of art and science."

It is perhaps this glorious history that influenced the development of the city, and which is still in our time one of the most important spiritual centres in Europe, and it may be this spirit of spontaneity and activity which forwarded the modern movement in architecture, starting in the Exchange of Architect Berlage, and now being one of the most characteristic features of modern Amsterdam and Holland.
Unfortunately we do not find a development of Town Planning as the natural completion of a highly developed architecture in this country, and it is interesting to notice an opposite development in England on these two terrains of human activity; in England there is just as rapid and original Town Planning as there is in comparison with Holland, very inferior architecture.

To the factors already mentioned there is still an important one to be mentioned. As in England, people in this country are very individualistic, and do not like interference with existing conditions; specially is this the case with the class of land owners. Whereas in England great things can be done by the existence of that typical "sense of compromise," the governments in Holland have to meet with very great difficulties, in the realisation of a scheme from the side of the interested land-owners. Practical Town Planning is up to a certain degree a question of authority and power, and as modern Town Planning must ask for the realisation of better conditions on the different fields of municipal life, it is easy to understand that the individual architect very often joins the opinion of the private landowner and undertaker. He sees in Town Planning a diminution of his unlimited liberty, and so far the private architect is right. The Town Planner in this field of work has to look after the whole, and the single building is the unit, and has to be—if Town Planning is to fulfill its real purpose—a part of an harmonious entity.

In Amsterdam exists a plan for the extension of the town to the south, which plan was composed many years ago. It suffers very much from the "défauts de ses qualités." It was completed at the time that Town Planning had not yet delivered itself of the influence of Sitte, and the attention of the Town Planner was too much attracted to the picturesque architectural features at the neglect of the great lines of the scheme, and not sufficient attention was paid to the study of the different sociological and technical factors. But even when we agree with those who call the plan a fairly bad scheme we must realise . . . that it is better to have a plan, even a somewhat inferior one . . . than no plan at all, for after the plan was approved by the authorities the railway company made a project for the laying-out of new lines in Amsterdam, which destroyed the greater part of the scheme.

After the war Amsterdam extended its territory to about 42,000 acres, of which about 25,000 acres are very thinly populated. By the very rapid growth of the town and the important building done after the war to decrease the housing shortness—due to the stagnancy of four years—the composition of a scheme for the whole area is necessary and urgent. The composition of such a scheme ought to be based on a careful study of the physical characteristics, the history of the growth, the present surface utilisation, the existing traffic routes, housing conditions, etc., together with a research on the ground of statistical and other investigations of the probable development in the future.

The vested interests, "which are inclined to be more powerful than considerate," as Adshead says, will perhaps cross the realisation of a similar plan, but when it will be possible to convince the people of the meaning of a scheme, and specially when attention can be called to the economical and also financial profits derived from it, the reaction will be overcome.

Amsterdam is situated on the south bank of the "Y," a very wide river (shortest distance between both banks, 1,800 feet). In recent years many factories and wharves have been built on the other side of the river, and as a result of this industrial development a new town has arisen in the vicinity of those works. The connection of the new and the old part of the town is very difficult, as the great harbours of Amsterdam are situated at the East End of the city, and therefore the whole shipping traffic must pass the "Y."

The difficulties with which Amsterdam has to deal and which bear special influence on the Town Planning problem, and of which we could only give a very short account, are so great and manifold that in recent times the idea has arisen to deal with the problem in the way proposed by the Garden City Association for London, namely, to found satellite cities round the old centre. Here we have a practical example of our remarks of the influence of the extension of a country. As in the well-known diagram of the Garden City Association, the distances of the different satellite towns to the centre of London vary from 32 to 13 miles; such distances would be impossible for Dutch situations. The possibility of forming new towns on the Garden City principle, and entirely self-contained, is restricted to one area with great natural beauty and inhabited by a mostly well-to-do population.
who will certainly try to prevent the realisation of the idea.

The housing conditions in the old city are in many districts very bad, and the slum quarters of Amsterdam are some of the most striking examples of unhealthy areas. The town is now clearing many of these districts, and removing the population to new houses.

The conditions in the slum quarters are due, to a great extent, to the many-storeyed tenement-dwelling and the narrowness of the streets, and although these parts are inhabited by a very impotent class, we may not forget what Culpin said some years ago at the Town Planning Congress in Manchester: "Slum conditions will make slum dwellers," and specially in this terrain there is still very much work to do.

The old centre is, with the increase of traffic, absolutely unfit to provide the facilities necessary. The widening of streets, etc., is very desirable, but can only be brought to a solution when this detail comes to be dealt with in connection with the general plan for the whole town.

After the war there was a great activity in the building of houses, and very interesting architectural work was done, but it is wise to state in this connection that the first fundamental principal is the provision of healthy sites for homes, and only when the conditions in regard to the homes of the people are put right great spectacular things can be done.

It is also right, from a social point of view, that attention should in the first place be given to the provision of good and pleasant houses for the people, and only when this question is put right, costly architectural schemes can be developed, and whilst admiring the skill and genius of many modern Architects, we must realise that Town Planning and also Architecture do not mean the putting of nice walls before bad houses. One cannot say much in connection with the new housing-schemes, of bad and entirely insufficient houses, yet perhaps a little too much attention has been given to the architectural side of the problem and too little to the social and Town Planning part.

As the title of this article says, these pages are only some general notes on the most important things in relation to Town Planning, and the limited space obliged us to restrict our study to the two greatest towns, and more especially to Amsterdam. In other towns, such as The Hague, Utrecht, etc., interesting work has been done, and perhaps we shall have the opportunity of writing another article on the Town Planning of the rest of Holland.

Town Planning Progress

The following Statistics have recently been published by the Ministry of Health:

Complete list of Local Authorities on whom Town Planning is compulsory.

Local Authorities that have already passed resolutions, or received authority to prepare Town Planning Schemes, shown by *

- Bedford
- Berkley
- Buckinghamshire
- Cambridgeshire
- Cheshire
- Cheshire
- Crewe
- Devonshire
- Dorsetshire
- Durham
- Essex
- Herefordshire
- Kent
- Dorset M.B.
- Poole M.B.
- Weymouth & Melcombe Regis M.B.
- Darlington C.B.
- Kirklees C.B.
- Sunderland C.B.
- West Hartlepool C.B.
- Blaydon U.D.
- Stockton-on-Tees M.B.
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- West Hartlepool C.B.
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