

The Significance of Appearance in the “Zaman Normal,” 1927-1942

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Introduction

The life span of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia can be seen as composed of various eras, with each producing an urban paradigm appropriate to its own condition. In the aftermath of popular radicalism in 1927, the colonial state marked a new era by constructing a particular form of urban paradigm. This paper aims at analyzing the appearance of a distinctive visual order in the urban environment associated, often unconsciously, with the “zaman normal” (the era of normalcy) (1927-1942). According to historian, Takashi Shiraishi (1996, 1997), “zaman normal” was the time of order and peace marked by the extensive surveillance apparatus of the colonial state watchful for any subversive movements. It replaced the “age in motion” (1912-1926), the period of “popular radicalism” and “native awakening” against Dutch colonial rule (Shiraishi, 1990). It also demanded a particular spatial and visual order that sought to prevent the return of urban radicalism and contribute to the production of a social norm based on normality and legibility in urban space. In this paper, I look beneath the conventional urban design ideologies (often represented in the language of climate and hygiene) to tease out the constitutive power of the political milieu within which these ideologies were embedded, and argue that the theatrical cast of the visual environment designated the opening of a new era of surveillance and self-regulation characteristic of the “zaman normal.” My argument however is that the nature of urban design in late colonial Indonesia, while apparently concerned with issues around hygiene, is actually an attempt to prevent the return of urban radicalism and, more importantly, of cultivating a sense of living in a new time and space associated with normalcy, peace and harmony.

My argument is based on an interpretation of articles from several journals, albums and books written by Dutch architects and planners between 1900 to 1940s, such as the *Locale Techniek* (1938-41), *Engineers of Netherlands Indies*, a few volumes of Tillema’s work, the proceedings of the housing congress in 1925, and the photo albums of Woodbury and Page and of *Het Indische Staatsbeeld voorheen en thans*. I approach them largely through a visual interpretation of the images and drawings, a practice that partly stems from not having access to the Dutch texts, and partly from the nature of “zaman normal” itself in which the visual occupied a significant position.

This study has also made me aware of how my own world of the Indies is mediated by the images represented by the “engineers” of the time, who, in their depiction of the Indonesian city, were also mediated by the camera, the social conventions of their time and the professional codes of design and drawing under which they were trained. The more I looked at the materials, the more I realized that, for different reasons, both the engineers and I were occupying a similar position, that of a “seeing subject” of a world to which we did not quite belong. In most of the images I looked at, there is a clear but unstated distance between the viewer and his/her object of viewing. The architects and planners, the photographers, the reformers, the scientists who contributed to these books were people who, consciously or unconsciously, conceived themselves as “engineers” who stood from the position of an observer even though they were embedded within the world they studied. But did Tillema and Karsten read Javanese or Sino Malay when they wrote about the world of Java and Indonesia? Would the Arabs, Chinese, and Javanese take pictures of the Indies town differently than those depicted by Tillema, Woodbury and Page?

As for myself, unable to read the texts except for a few translated synopses and

captions in Indonesian, I found myself to be an interpreter of mere appearances. The images of buildings, the scenes of the streets, and the site plan of the town operate as the “appearance” of histories. Yet, aren’t the buildings, the spatial settings, and the urban images what people in the city actually saw, as the photographs urge us to see? Doesn’t the eye see appearances before they are subjected to interpretation? It is perhaps a coincidence, or may be a kind of blessing in disguise that my “seeing only appearances” seems to correspond to the formal characteristics of the “zaman normal.” Here is thus an interpretative, if not a speculative, reading that aims at making sense of the spatial representation of the late Dutch colonialism in Indonesia.

A. The New Regime of Seeing

In 1937, the Committee for the Decentralization of the Netherlands Indies held its congress in Batavia. The Congress was rather special that year for it displayed a series of photographs depicting the change in the cityscape of the Netherlands Indies over the past twenty years. After a tour of several cities, some of the photographs were finally published as an album for the occasion of the 25th birthday of the *Social Technische Commissie Van de Vereeniging voor Iole belangen*. The purpose of the publication, according to Engineer (Ir) Lemei and his colleagues of the *Social Technische*, was to make the general public (more) aware of the new visual and implicitly, social changes in the urban environment. Ir. Lemei and his colleagues understood the change as the demand of time, however, they were worried about the current visual quality of the city. They considered many of the new buildings to be damaging the environmental character of the Indies town (*karakter der omgeving*). More specifically, Ir. Lemei lamented the disappearance of plants and vegetation, which for years had given character to the “tropical town.” Meanwhile Ir. Lemei’s colleague, the prominent town planner, Thomas Karsten, noticed an unprecedented tendency in the colony, that is, in the appearance order and ordering (*ordening*) in the urban environment. He also seemed to recognize that this tendency towards order stemmed from the colonial government’s new obsession with order and rule in the late 1920s.

The new regime of order, observed by Karsten and Lemei, could indeed be discerned in several photographs exhibited in the Congress. For instance, in a pair of photographs entitled “Semarang, Societeitsbrug, Groote Huis en Bojong: ca 1920 and 1937,” two pictures of a different time offer a scene that represents the emergence of a particular sense of order. **(Figure 1 and 1a)** The caption notes

“the widened bridge, the heavy pillars for lanterns and the architectural detailing make the bridge look heavy; The landscaping of the Big House (then the Governor Office) and the new Javasche Bank at the end of the street. Some trees remain.”

The disappearance of plants and trees has indeed made the buildings in the area look more substantial and visible. As buildings made their appearance by displacing the trees, a visual regime based on order and ordering began to rule the city. We do not know who took these pictures, but we can make something out of the quality of communication in the photographs.

The camera of these two pictures was set above the ground. It surveyed the street. It caught the disappearance of trees and the increasing visibility of buildings on both sides of the street. The buildings and the street, in turn, created a frame for our eyes to locate the human figures on the bridge. These human figures, however, are not significant. The presence of tiny human figures is meant more to show that they were following the layout of the city space: the strollers on the sidewalks, the automobile and horse carriage in their designated lanes all moving along the direction set up by the street. We, the viewers, find it

easier to identify ourselves with the order of the city than with anyone on the street. The street and its surrounding architecture have appropriated the human figures. There is a quality of policing in the photograph where the human figures are controlled by the grid of the urban space. We, the viewers, become the police, or we could become the human figures in the picture under the surveillance of the camera. The picture structures our way of seeing. It invites us to place ourselves within the designated urban space. In fact, there is a policeman in both pictures, but the policeman, like other human figures, is secondary, for he too was placed inside the camera even as he contributed to making people knowing their place. The symbolism of the city in these pictures lies not in the monumentality of the building or in the monument of the powerful but in the spatial arrangement for the proper placement of the human figure who had become the subject of representation.

What does the scene in *Het Indische Stadsbeeld* lead us to? It does not lead us to satisfaction over the improvement of the colony as it was – perhaps - intended. Instead, it leads us to understand that by the 1930s the urban space had become a pedagogical apparatus which, through its organization of space, attempted to create an obedient “public.” The scene of “Semarang, Societeitsburg” represented the “glass house” of the colonial government which, since the anti-colonial revolts in 1926, began to monitor the urban life of the colony through the optic of urban design. Indeed, the visual environment of the 1930s was different from that of the 1910s. The photo albums, which juxtaposed images of these two periods, in the manner of then and now, suggested a watershed in Indonesian urban history, one which had given rise to a new form of power based on order and visibility. This new order, I suspect, was not only a response to urbanization and public health, but also a move to make use of urban space to further the effective surveillance of the Indies population. The idea is not merely the question of the state imposing legibility by law and order on particular sites for particular people, but more importantly, the challenge lies in how, through the use and perception of urban space, people in the Indies would be involved in creating a proper image for themselves.

B. The Dream and the Phantom World of Digoel

Historian Takashi Shiraishi, indicates that after the destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1926/27, the “pergerakan” (the urban-based popular radical movements for a new and free-transnational world) as a whole met its violent death. In its place, the Indies government installed “an extensive and effective surveillance apparatus ever watchful of and ready to crush any ‘subversive’ movement.” (Shiraishi 1990: 339) We might also indicate that, central to this apparatus, was the urban space and the ways in which the imagery and legibility of a particular place created a self-regulating perception among the public of what is normal and abnormal. First, let me discuss the construction of “normality” through one of the state apparatuses indicated by Shiraishi, one that involved the “penal colony” called Boven Digoel, invented for the disciplining of post 1926 Indonesia. (Shiraishi 1996, 1997, 2003)

Boven Digoel was the first mass internment camp to be located at the center of the malaria-infested New Guinea. After crushing the communist revolts in 1926/27, the Dutch colonial government institutionalized Digoel for people involved in “subversive” movements. Digoel, however, was in fact neither a penal colony nor a concentration camp, but a place for all the trouble makers “to live a normal live under abnormal conditions.” (Shiraishi 1996: 93) The colony led a “normal” life in the sense that all the internees enjoyed “the same rights and are subjected to the same obligations which law under normal circumstances demands from and bestows upon other free persons.” (Gov. General – 1928,

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as cited in Mrazek, 1996: 41) These “free” prisoners were supposed to (re)create for themselves a life which would eliminate their revolutionary past. Central to this attempt was the creation of a self-styled harmonious community life akin to that of a village in which every internee could become a “normal” villager. Rudolf Mrazek (1996) and Takashi Shiraishi (1996, 1997) have analyzed in detail the social and political contradiction of this strangely “normalized” life of the internees in Digoel. What I would like to emphasize is that this construction of “normality,” however, was “abnormal” in a sense that no such “village community” could be created except in a stage-like manner. J.J. Schrieke, the government representative for general affairs at the Volksraad was one of those who were most aware of the artificial quality of Boven Digoel when he pointed out that Digoel was “a special place of residence, on an island that is uninhabited (or whose population has been evacuated), not unhealthy, not too big, situated in the deep sea, easy to guard, offering space for about one hundred families, without a post office – where each internee can be provided with a hut and a plot of land for his permanent dwelling.” (as cited in ?) This isolated “colonial showcase” implies a theater-like setting which involved an audience who watched from afar the internees in the colony “dying, going insane, or being broken.” (Shiraishi 1996: 94)

The camp was thus not meant for any improvement in the life of the internees. Instead, it provided a spectacle of punishment for the gaze of people outside Digoel. The colonial administration regularly released news in Malay newspapers reporting the condition of the people in Digoel, often accompanied by internee’s letters to their relatives and friends. Indonesians were thus provided with an image of the abnormality of the “normal” life of Digoel. In this sense, the main target of Digoel was not the die-hard revolutionaries (who had already been contained), but other Indonesians back home who might still have the dream of reviving radical movements against Dutch rule. The fearful image of the detention camp, circulated in the mass media, would make people (outside Digoel) know their place, behave and stay away from anti-colonial movements. Shiraishi points out that “Digoel and its camps functioned both to refract and to reflect the normal, that is Digoel by definition demarcated the boundaries between the normal and abnormal, the cooperative and the recalcitrant, thereby separating the rational colonial order and the psychopathic fringe population ... Normalcy was thus contingent on a complex apparatus of policing that marked and partitioned colonial territories, subjects, and signs.” (Shiraishi 1996: 118)

We don’t know how effective the image of Digoel was in taming Indonesian’s fantasy of liberation, but there were various responses to the image of Digoel. Shiraishi reports that in 1933, Sukarno was “so terrified at the thought of living in Digoel, away from his mother and perhaps without his wife,” that he preferred cooperation with the colonial government (Shiraishi 1996: 94). Meanwhile, Indonesians who lived through the 1930s measured themselves up as “normal” against the “abnormality” of Digoel. They would perhaps say something like: we are “normal” compare to those who are living in Digoel, and we will remain normal as far as we prevent ourselves from the possibility of being taken to Digoel. The image of isolation and the strange life of Digoel had not only served to reduce anti-colonial movements but it had created a sense among people that they have been “normal” for they do not and will not, after all, find themselves in the penal colony. So pervasive was the image of Digoel, that Indonesians remembered the 1930s as “zaman normal” and the period of 1927-1942 as the age of Digoel, “for the normalcy in the Indies in these years was constituted fundamentally on the phantom world of Digoel.” (Shiraishi 1996: 118)

Shiraishi’s wonderful facsimiles encourage us to go beyond his analytical concern. Take, for example, the efforts of the city government in creating the image of a “normal”

town by way of organizing buildings and making order in the appearance of the urban space. To go back to the image of the Berug-bridge in Semarang, one could project oneself walking across the bridge, following the path, and moving within the frame of the camera. One knows that he or she is behaving well, knowing his or her place in the grid of the city, and thus appearing “normal.” Both the photograph and the urban space normalize the scene while serving as a medium for the disciplining of the daily experience of the city.

If we bear in mind this Digoelian politics of social control, we might be able to consider some of the post-1926 urban design paradigms as a conscious or unconscious articulation of the visual order of the “zaman normal.” In the time of zaman “normal,” urban space functioned as a “mirror” for an identification of what is “normal” and what is “pathological.” Central to the architecture of zaman normal is thus the way in which urban space had become not only a symbol of power or a representation of the authority. Instead it had become more like a “mirror” for the viewing subjects to reflect on his/her own subjectivity.

C. The Street and the New Market

The prominent architect and urban planner, Ir. Thomas Karsten, was aware of the centrality of the visual environment as the site of signification. Karsten formulated the colonial town as an “organism” which, he believed, can be coordinated visually on the ground as well as from above. The town can be seen as an organism, organized around “the interrelationship between the various sections, centers, important buildings, and other sources of traffic, and the over-all form of the town and the arterial system through which its traffic streams.” (in Wertheim, 1958: 35). The most critical part of this formulation is not only how various elements might be connected to constitute the whole, but also how to govern the parts which would otherwise refuse to be incorporated. The challenge of urban design during the zaman normal is to coordinate and integrate the unruly parts so that they will become a component of the “normal.” Under the regime of order and visibility, the sight of unruliness would have to be removed or given a place in order to guarantee the presence of the “proper.” A modest illustration of this can be found in the creation of the city market seen as a “proper” place for the street vendors who, by the 1930s, were no longer allowed to move freely on the streets. It has been a phenomenon of the Indies town, Karsten said,

“... that instead of going to the *pasar*, the small-scale trader, who is usually Native, tries to find his customers in the street, either keeping on the move most of the time or else, if he can, finding a more or less fixed spot, often at or nearby an intersection... The objections are the sometimes-gross pollution of the streets, the nuisance to the public and / or to the houses along the street, the unsightliness... The Western authorities, particularly, often find it intolerable that these typical, and usually rather unpretentious, forms of Native economic life manifest themselves in “European” sections. Indeed the disorderliness usually accompanying such economic forms is out of place, and hence is a nuisance objectively as well as subjectively... The warongs (food stalls) are disfiguring the urban scene with an unsightly structure generally having an extensive appendage of benches, awnings, screens, and cooking utensils. Properly such warongs should be located only at well-chosen and well-equipped points... Such things need to be given full consideration in drafting the street plans and neighborhood plans.” (Karsten in Wertheim 1958: 38)

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The basic frame of reference here is order, place and visibility which, by the 1930s, were considered as paramount to the well-being of people in the Indies town. The nomadic vendors and their customers were to be contained and their movements framed by walls. Accordingly, towards the end of the 1920s, many city markets were built in order to stop the unruly movements of the small-scale traders so that there would be no crowds on the streets. The ideas were put into practice. In Semarang, in 1910, there used to be only 8 bazaars, but by 1936, the number had jumped to 18. To further contain the mobility of small-scale traders, several bazaars were brought together to form a central market. In Semarang, for instance, the Pasar Djohar, Pedamaran, Beteng, Djoernatan, and Pekodjan were all blended together to form the Semarang Central Market. (*Locale Techniek*, 1938) The city markets were generally built in two-story form of concrete materials with light and ventilation. They were fully enclosed, clean and spatially organized according to the classification of goods. They were located strategically at the center of the city, near the alun-alun (the square associated with the indigenous palatial compound), and close to other shops. Once placed within the neighborhood plans and contained in a building complex, the nomadic traders and customers became part of the domestic scene.

We can see this in another set of photographs exhibited in the Congress. “The Pasar in Malang,” depicted the scenes of the New Market in the 1930s (**figure 2 and 2a**). The picture is taken from above the ground. It points straight to the clock at the entrance tower of the bazaar. The effect is similar to that of the bridge of Semarang. Human figures moved according to the movement provided by the clock and the spaces of the buildings. No one seems to be outside the grid of the market space and the regulated time of the clock. With the creation of the new market, street vending became “out of place.” Vendors became wanderers and “liar” (wild) while their activities were considered pathological to the economy of the city market. The matter here is not only about the order of the city and the “taming” of the street vendors, but also the effects of the city market and the impression it makes on the street vendors. The displacement of the street vendors had provided a new sense of “normalcy” to the sellers and buyers who found themselves in the designated space of the city market.

With the establishment of the city market, urbanites were more able to perceive urban order/disorder. It is no coincidence that Indonesian novelist Marco in 1925 took up the city market in Surabaya as a setting for one of his short stories. (Kartodikromo, 1981) Marco was clearly impressed by the discourse of order around the city market. His detailed description of the policeman directing traffic in front of the Main Market of Surabaya indicated the newness of the regime of order. When the protagonist of the story and his friend

“... got to the Main Market they stopped a moment at the edge of the road, for something had caught their eye. Even though it was almost midnight, there was still a police officer on duty, directing the continuous flow of traffic to both left and right... When the policeman help up his hand in one direction, telling the traffic to stop, traffic in the other direction would go. While this was happening, traffic in the other direction built up, waiting for the policeman to give them the ‘go’ signal.”(Kartodikromo 1981: 22)

The Main Market, however, is not merely a place for police to ensure the bounds of the established form. Instead, as Marco presented it, the Main Market impressed him as having a fragile stability. There was more energy circulating around the building than was normally at use. Other transactions, uncontainable by the police and the order of the street, featured in

Marco's story. "Not far from where the policeman was standing keeping the peace, two sailors could be seen in the doorway of the new concrete market building. At least seven neatly dressed women were swarming about them, laughing loudly and pulling occasionally at their sleeves. Quite obviously they were the 'flowers of the night,' – busy, modern and famous Surabaya's 'decorations.'" (Kartodikromo, 1981: 22)

D. The Aesthetic of the New Kampong

By the 1930s, the performance of "belanja" (shopping in the market) had been normalized by the clock and kept indoor by the new market. "Belanja" is no longer simply a nomadic street activity, but a functional element of a site plan coordinated in relation to the police station, town hall, mosques, theatre, sports stadium and recreation. In the meantime, the image of the urban kampong had become more disturbing for the urban planners of the zaman normal. With the growth of European settlements and the concomitant demand for what was considered a healthy environment, the urban reformers had to incorporate into their urban vision, the huge space and hardly known areas called the "kampong." Yet the adherents of modern planning had great difficulty in organizing this extensive space because they had no complex categories for the kampong world. As the population in the area had grown intensively even Indonesians had difficulty in imaging the world of the kampong. For instance, in the 1920s, some of the Indonesian radicals who were looking for a spatial base to organize their operation units recognized with caution that "kampong populations are composed of various groups and classes, namely workers, petit bourgeoisie, officials, spies, etc., and the strength that resides in the kampong is not strong enough to build a communist society." (Shiraishi, 1990: 314)

There were indeed many different kinds of kampong realities but, in the eyes of the colonial state, none was as worrying as the potential for the kampong to become a source for social unrest. In Karsten's view: "Considering the great significance of the home to the Indonesians, such a (poor kampong) situation cannot help call into being strong feelings of dissatisfaction and social inequality, with all their political consequences." (Karsten in Wertheim 1958: 19) In 1926, the pharmacist-reformist entrepreneur H.F. Tillema referred particularly to the relations between rebellion and sanitation. He asked the government to "consider that wormseed oil is a good medicine and strap oil a bad one, that the injection needle and the lancet are definitely better and more humane tools of civilization and pacification than the bayonet and the chopping knife." (Tillema in Wertheim 1958: xi). Tillema's works (1913-1926) belonged to the age of "pergerakan" – the time of the "natives awakening" and "popular radicalism" which generated "disturbances, irregularities and confusions" especially in the urban centers of Indonesia. Through his private publications, he worked to improve the Indies town. He was perhaps the first to see the affinity between the visual and the social order and provided thus a paradigm for the zaman normal. His work opened a path for Thomas Karsten who, by the end of the 1920s, was convinced that "the town's beauty are outward signs of an inner order and harmony; they testify to the character of the town's society in the same way facial traits testify to the character of the person." (Karsten in Wertheim 1958: 55)

Karsten's phenomenology ends in the revelation that the appearance of the town signals particular meaning. It plays the role of a face that not only represents the soul, but also affects the way a viewer would interpret facial expression. When the kampong has a character of an aesthetic harmony, so the story goes, it holds everything together and controls the unity needed for the well-being of its inhabitants. Karsten's strong sense of environmental determinism convinced him that "a people forced to live in disorderly and

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unfriendly towns will be encouraged in a tendency towards social discontent and unruliness. Hence the degree of aesthetic harmony and beauty in the Indies town, though above all important from the idealistic point of view, also has a very concrete, in fact almost a political significance from the realistic point of view.” (Karsten in Wertheim, 1958: 55)

The simplest but exciting way to achieve inner order and harmony would be to build a new kampong for “the old city remained an unhealthy place in spite of all improvements and would be best thrown to the ground.” (as cited in Cobban 1988: 279) This was the view of Tillema, the protagonist of the “new” urban kampong and the first modernist in the Indies. Unlike Karsten, Tillema was convinced that the urban kampong could not be improved unless it was built anew. His vision of a normal city is just incommensurable with his knowledge of kampong. He collected photographs to illustrate the poor conditions of the kampong, and he used the knowledge of hygiene to plan his new kampong. He recommended the creation of new town oriented in the direction of major winds, wide streets lined with trees and houses around open space adapted to tropical heat and humidity. **(Figure 3)** He considered the city that did not fulfill the demands of hygiene, ventilation and lighting as abnormal. He drew comparison with 19th century discourses of public health in Europe. His *van wonen en bewonen, van bouwen, huis en erf* drew cases from British colonies and built up arguments from literatures concerning environment and health that brings us back to the “garden city” movement in Europe. Nevertheless it would not be stretching the evidence too far to argue that Tillema’s kampong model was shaped by the spatial form of the “village community” in the Indies, a discourse which was first created by the colonial government in the late 19th century to regulate the rural area.

Historian Jan Breman (1980), in his study of the Dutch policy of “desa” (village) in Java, has traced the process by which a “village community” came into being in the late 19th century. Building on the work of Onghokham, Breman shows the emergence in rural Java of well-ordered and standardized village settlements as a result of colonial policy of controlling labor, land and taxation. Up until 1870, the “desa” boundaries were never clearly delineated, and houses were spread out over different settlements. The colonial administration however demanded them to be ordered so that the population could be tied to the land through their fixed residence. In *The Village on Java and the Early-Colonial State*, Breman includes a site plan that illustrates the reordering of the scattered village settlement into a fenced off compound of one guarded entryway. **(figure 4)** Except for the village head, the type of housing within the compound was standardized. The important consequence of this imagined “desa” compound is not merely the construction of a “harmonious community,” but also the production of order and disorder, of things seen and unseen, and of the categories insider and outsider. Those who were the member of the compound would be recognized as normal, whereas those who were not would become vagabonds and wonderers with a possibility of getting involved in a subversive act. It is not clear whether such an idealized compound had ever existed, but the image of an exclusively organized community constructed on the basis of order and visibility was already available before the urban turn of the zaman normal.

For Tillema, however, the ordering of space is not merely for the security and control. His model does not provide a guardhouse and there is no watchtower around the compound. His well-organized buildings would ensure functional and visual surveillance. The provision of facilities and well-ordered space would guarantee the self-regulation of human behavior. The new kampong he proposed includes a complete set of infrastructure and services such as the system of drainage, rubbish removal, sanitation, water supply as well as facilities for sport, bathing, playing and landscaping. All these facilities were carefully

placed to ensure order and visibility. The new visual order served as a symbol of urban modernity and represented a ritual of living that is “normal,” controllable and predictable. It also represents the era, if not a culture of the “zaman normal.”

In the zaman normal, the norm of order and visibility is not only meant for the colonized. Instead, it was also applied to the regulation of the privileged. In the following last section, I will consider the design of the Koningsplein (the King’s Square) to see how the authority planned to “normalize” the public. The design challenge of Koningsplein during the zaman normal, I believe, was filled with the questions not only of political symbolism, but also of signification which involved the visibility of both the “king” and his subjects.

E. King’s Square (Koningsplein)

In the early 1920s, the famous Dutch architect, the “father of modern architecture,” H.P. Berlage visited Indonesia. In 1923, he found Batavia, the capital city of the colonial government, was on the move. “The city is on the railway,” he said, uncomfortably. (Mrazek 2002: 64) And in general, cities in the Indies “were built as floating.” (Mrazek 2002: 65) Berlage’s unsettling comment seemed to be founded on the radical “age in motion” in which even the relatively controlled city of Batavia was filled with a sense of instability. Perhaps as a way to end this uncertainty, in 1937, the Koningsplein which, in 1923 was suspended from reconstruction due to the time of malaise, was opened for redesign. **(Figure 5)** The Koningsplein was expected to be the center that would bring a sense of normalcy back to the Indies. This was obviously a big challenge. Between 1936 and 1939, the redesigning of the Koningsplein was the leading feature of the technical journals, such as the *Engineer in Netherlands Indies*. Photographs of the models and sketches were presented and they invited debate. **(Figure 6)**

By the 1930s architects have known that the best way to control the city is to create models for it. For the first time the design of the Koningsplein was imagined through models. From the model and the site plan, we can see a large empty square divided by a grid pattern on which were laid out buildings, streets and pathways. There is a railway station, a museum, a stadium, a telephone office, the office of the Resident, and at the center, the Raadhuis. Set in the vast square, all these buildings however are impressively small, if not cute, especially in its miniaturized form. The large empty square had further reduced the scale of the buildings, especially the Raadhuis, which is impressively small. It appears as a tiny building protected by a row of trees. More than one plan was made for the Koningsplein, but they all propose that the Raadhuis to be at the center, visibly important but protected. The only element that had made the Raadhuis appeared monumental is the approach to it. In one model, the boulevard was lined with trees, and in another, with a row of buildings on both sides. At the center, the Raadhuis commands the surroundings. It looks out as if it is watched from everywhere. It is not surprising then that a most intensely debated topic concerned the visibility of the Raadhuis in the square. Some people were concerned that the series of trees might block the view towards the buildings in the square.

The 1937 plan for Koningsplein recalls the ethical politics of Dutch architects and reformers. The pharmacist-entrepreneur H.F. Tillema in his magnum opus had proclaimed that any building for Westerners in the Indies (Wasn’t the Raadhuis essentially for the Westerners?) “should be designed modestly, and also otherwise adjusted to the Eastern circumstances.” (as cited in Mrazek, 2002: 68) Thomas Karsten, one of the designers for the new Koningsplein, was also fully aware of the importance of Tillema’s dictum of the “Eastern circumstances.” Karsten wrote:

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“Though historical information on the subject is scanty, there is sufficient evidence for this point in the well-planned and systematic design of several large Native towns, many medium-sized and smaller ones, and the often excellently laid-out rural kampongs... The town-planning implications of these Native attitudes need to be considered here. Their social implications are vast, since they indicate that Native society is in principle quite willing to submit to guidance and planning for the general good, as long as such guidance and planning are in keeping with Native traditions... such as the orientation of dwellings facing approximately north and south, and the arrangement of the village around the alun-alun and the important buildings clustered about it. (Karsten in Wertheim 1958: 69-70)’

Looking at the site plan of the Koningsplein, one cannot avoid seeing a synthesis or contextualization. The appearances of the buildings in Koningsplein not only formed relations to one another, but they constructed an aesthetic of zaman normal – a gesture of reconciliation, of returning to a normal state when the cosmos between the ruler and the ruled was in order. The term for unification however was not to go back to the past relation, but to look for the present shared responsibility and propriety that would ensure order, harmony and peace. The architectural reference for this vision might have been drawn from various sources, but I would like to draw our attention to a domestic one.

The new Koningsplein recalls the prototypical map of the “layout of an average regency seat,” made under the supervision of Dutch geographer H.Ph.Th.Witkamp, to represent what one might “reasonably expect to find in a (peaceful) Indonesian town.” (Figure 7) (Wertheim 1958) Witkamp brought into visibility as many as 174 items of buildings and spaces and listed each of them in the key to the layout map. (Figure 8) There is a precise quality of policing, of naming and of seeing things that used to be unseen. To ensure visibility from above, trees were imagined as absence. Referring to the map, Tillema reminded us that “it might be pointed out that the vegetation is usually denser than is indicated: it has been underemphasized on the map in order to accentuate the location of the various buildings.” (in Wertheim 1958: 82) With the vegetation at the background, everything it used to conceal was opened for view. “They are all there: the regent, the assistant resident, the photographer, the president of the district court, the kampong head, the Chinese noodle vendor, the pedlar, the salt-supply administrator, and all the others.” (in Wertheim 1958: 81) They are all connected. The map has in its center the alun-alun (the square), bordered to the north by the dwelling of the (Dutch) Assistant Resident and to the South, the (‘native’) Regent. Surrounding them are “the mosque, the barracks for the military police, the house of the police chief, the guest house, and the boarding house.” Round about the center dwell the “Europeans who are not in government service, the Javanese, and further away, the Chinese.” (81) The list continues ... “everything has found a place.” (82) Witkamp’s layout created an order for the town which would otherwise be hidden under the trees. The visibility of the buildings on the map evaded the sense of unruliness on the ground. One only needs to follow the surveyed plan and go down with one’s camera into the most private section of the kampong, such as the latrines. In fact, this technique of seeing from a birds-eye-view and down to the field was what Tillema did for his *Kromoblanda*. With camera and maps, he created a sense of order and disorder for the reality on the ground.

The Koningsplein of Karsten, in a way, played out the map of Witkamp, but the square is much more abstract, pure and standardized. The average regency seat of Witkamp had been further “normalized.” Karsten followed the “traditional” North-South orientation,

but he did not cut the vegetation. He did not imagine that the vegetation was not there. Instead, Karsten organized the plants in an orderly manner. As the naturally grown trees in the late Indies cities “were becoming something of a sign of imperfection” (Mrazek 2002: 66), Karsten transplanted “display trees,” ones that “grow fast but not beyond the guidelines of the plan.” (Mrazek 2002: 66) The 1937 Koningsplein provided such a display of trees for they were there to help bringing normalcy to the capital city. The 1937 design of the Koningsplein could be seen as a replica of Witkamp’s plan in which synthesis among elements would help maintain the cosmic balance that had been displaced by the “age in motion.” However, unlike Witkamp’s plan, there is no need for the police house in the Koningsplein for there is no place to hide in the empty square where buildings were small and subject to the gaze of eyes from all sides. The well-placed buildings would give no space for any unruly development or behavior. The site plan and the birds-eye-view of the models would give no time to anyone to move in without being seen. The site plan, if realized, is sufficient to generate propriety and normal behavior essential for building up a culture for the “zaman normal.”

F. Conclusion: The Lessons of Zaman Normal

In a way, all the different spatial politics that I have sketched out relate to the history of “zaman normal.” Of course, the urban discourses of the zaman normal were marked by inherent tensions. They carry with them the implication of disruption, as the appearance of urban order became not only a location of control but also a repository of energies to install different orders and different rationalities. Those who have done research on the urban life of zaman normal would be able to tell us different stories as well as provide different perceptions and interpretations of Indonesian activities and behavior during the appearances of urban order at that time. What I would like to emphasize in conclusion is that the urban discourses of the zaman normal have enormous consequences for the spatial politics of the postcolonial “zaman order baru” (New Order of Suharto) Most notably, they were born from the crushing of radical movements and the implementation of surveillance by an apparatus of suppression. And for both of them, ideas about order, stability, and normalcy are central activities. These two regimes of order have also been haunted by their memories of violence, which demanded them to create a sense of “normality” for the present. It would be useful to set up a comparison between the colonial “zaman normal” and the postcolonial “orde baru.” In this conclusion I can only suggest that what our city and urban life was like during the “order baru” can be better understood in relation to the zaman normal.

Let me end by showing the image of a new town of our time (**figure 9**). The photograph is taken from a housing promotional handbook published in the 1990s by the Indonesian government and a housing business group. It is captioned “healthy housing environment.” There is nothing particularly unusual in the image (except perhaps for its “normality”) for it has become part of our daily life today: the single family house, a few human figures – children and mother, the car, a small park with almost no trees except some newly planted ones for “display” only, but, most importantly perhaps, a security post with a guard in it at a strategic location of the compound. Yet this image embodies a larger set of unresolved issues that have been the subject of this paper: questions concerning order and control; visibility and surveillance, social exclusion and legibility; harmony and identity. It represents the normalcy of our time, but what we also observe, however, is that we are back in the flow of history, to the era of the zaman normal, the dream world of Tillema and the age of Digoel.