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Picturing landscape : contemporary photography, collective visual memory and the making of place in the Netherlands

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Chapter 3

GEOMETRICAL ABSTRACTION:

BAUMSCHULE #2 (2009) BY GERCO DE RUIJTER

To research ways in which contemporary photography projects make place of the Netherlands, the second case study I discuss is *Baumschule #2* (2009), by Dutch photographer Gerco de Ruijter (b. 1961). (Fig. 3.1) This photograph is part of a series of 32 photographs with the same title, *Baumschule*, which the photographer made between 2008 and 2010. *Baumschule #2* is conceived by the photographer and perceived by the public as a singular artwork. This is also indicated by the fact that De Ruijter produces these photographs as exhibition prints in monumental sizes of 110 x 110 cm, mounted on dibond. Particularly apt to the art circuit, the photographs are produced in editions of five, and numbered accordingly as 1/5, 2/5, etc.

The photographs of the *Baumschule* series are identical in terms of concept: they all show tree nurseries in the Dutch landscape, photographed through aerial photography. For this (like his other) series, De Ruijter attaches a camera on a rod, a kite or a balloon and takes the photographs using a remote control.³¹⁸ Through cropping, he further composes the picture into a geometrical, symmetric image; no digital manipulation is involved.



Fig. 3.1 Gerco de Ruijter, *Baumschule #2*, 21 december 2009,

³¹⁸ As part of an introduction to the landscape photography of Northern Europe in the exhibition catalogue *Sense of Place: European Landscape Photography*, Victoria&Albert Museum curator of photography Martin Barnes speaks of a 'charming inventivity' with which De Ruijter chooses his tools to elevate the camera in the photographic process. Gill and Sullivan 2012, p. 18. De Ruijter distances himself explicitly from drone photography, not least because of their connotations with military application. Conversation with the photographer on 1 June 2017.

chromogenic print on dibond, 110 x 110 cm, coll. the artist
(Photograph of tree nursery near Rehnen, Kesteren, Opheusden,
in the clay ground of a river landscape.)

De Ruijter has been making this kind of aerial photograph throughout his career since he left Rotterdam Art Academy in 1993. In general, his photographs focus on the way man structures and systematizes the cultural landscape, and on the geometrical forms and patterns that result from this.

In his earlier work, like the series *6"x6"* (1994-2003) and *Down by the Sea* (1997-2010), the cropping of the pictures often resulted in compositions with diagonal, curved or organic, capriciously shaped lines. (Fig. 3.2)



Fig. 3.2, Gerco de Ruijter, *Untitled*, 1997, from the series *6"x6"*/The Netherlands, chromogenic print on dibond, 15.2 x 15.2 cm, coll. the artist

His later photographs, culminating in the extreme geometrical abstract photographs in *Almost Nature* (2012-2014, fig. 54), increasingly show straight lines and patterns that rigidly parallel the borders of the square photographic print. For the analysis in this chapter, I have chosen *Baumschule #2*, a photograph made in wintertime when the earth's surface was covered with snow, in the neighbourhood of Rhenen, Kesteren and Opheusden.

It is especially challenging to apply the three steps of georeferencing, geospecific comparison and geogeneric comparison in the case of De Ruijter. Specifically, georeferencing and geospecific comparison are demanding. De Ruijter's photograph does not show the environment or reveal any recognisable views or points of interest. In terms of subject, composition and style, *Baumschule #2* does not bear any resemblance to the paintings that were made of the same scenery in the past. Finally, De

Ruijter was *not* aware of the rich visual history of the place so did not consciously juxtapose an anti-image with this landscape.³¹⁹ This raises the question of whether, in this case, georeferencing and geospecific comparison is a relevant approach. In the following paragraphs, I will argue that it is. The extreme extent to which the image is isolated from its scenic surroundings and is contrary to the conventional imagery of the place, profiles the photographic intervention by De Ruijter more clearly.

De Ruijter's photographic process makes the area he photographed appear almost antithetical to what is conventional for this place. In this regard, the photographic theory of changing camera positions, formulated by Westgeest in *Take Place*, in a discussion of an installation by Nieuwenhuys, is especially helpful here.³²⁰ In terms of subject matter, composition and style, Burgin's writing on 'point-of-view' and 'frame' as key signifying features, and Snyder and Allen's focus on camera position and framing help us to understand how *Baumschule #2* works as a structure of representation.³²¹ More than the other two case studies, *Baumschule #2* is apt for analysis due to what Bazin, in the context of paintings, calls an 'inwardly directed, still, framed picture'.³²² In addition, theory from German artist and writer Hito Steyerl should be considered here, in particular her idea about the vertical perspective caused by a camera positioned high in the air and directed downwards.³²³

3.1 tree nurseries on the banks of the Lower Rhine

Unlike in the case of Baart's *Werklust*, the geographical location of the artwork *Baumschule #2* is not offered to the public as information accompanying the artwork; this is despite the fact that De Ruijter could easily provide the geographical co-ordinates of it.³²⁴ Based on the notes and memory of the photographer himself, and by reconstructing his itinerary and work plan on a map, the artwork can be geotagged using the following co-ordinates.³²⁵

Longitude 5.552453893782801

Latitude 51.94421084187625

This point on the map is linked to *Baumschule #2* through the indexical relation of the photograph. Speaking in the terms of Hackeloeer, it is an exactly defined formal 0-dimensional location, indicated by the geographical co-ordinates. This can be visualized in digital maps, such as Google Maps or Google Earth.³²⁶ (Fig. 3.3)

³¹⁹ As stated by De Ruijter in conversations during the research for this dissertation, for example in a conversation 31 May 2017.

³²⁰ Westgeest 2009 especially pp. 101-108.

³²¹ Burgin 1982 [1980], p. 146.

³²² Bazin 2005 [1971], p. 55.

³²³ Steyerl 2011. Actually, as will be pointed out in my conclusive chapter 5, in the article 'In Free Fall', Hito Steyerl mentions and covers exactly the three different perspectives, represented in Baart's *Werklust*, De Ruijter's *Baumschule #2* and Boske's *Mapping 5*.

³²⁴ Telephone conversation with the photographer on 5 December 2016.

³²⁵ Information provided by the photographer digitally (through WeTransfer) on 5 December 2016.

³²⁶ Hackeloeer 2014, p. 61.



Fig. 3.3 Location (with marker) within the Netherlands, near the Lower Rhine River ('Neder-Rijn', the continuation of the river Rhine, which enters the Netherlands from Germany), where De Ruijter took his photograph for *Baumschule #2*.

In order to gain a phenomenological understanding of *Baumschule #2* in relation to its physical environment, it is informative to know the agency of the photographer in respect of the physical landscape seen in the photograph. Unlike Baart, who had a biographical relationship with the landscape he photographed, and who explored it himself physically, moving and hiking around with his camera and wandering about what he saw, De Ruijter had no prior relationship with the river landscape of *Baumschule #2*. According to the photographer, he chose his location on the map, looking for a certain landscape *type*: landscape that features highly industrialised and systemised horticulture. Considering three of the four landscape dimensions discerned by Steenbergen and Reh – the ground, the

programmatic and the spatial form – brings us to a deeper, more phenomenological understanding of this particular case.

The Dutch landscape is generally characterised as a river delta, where several rivers from different directions in Europe flow out into the North Sea. The area near the towns of Rhenen, Kesteren and Opheusden is where three large rivers – the Meuse, which enters the Netherlands from Belgium in the south, and the Waal and the Rhine that flow from the east out of Germany into the Netherlands – come quite close to each other. (See maps above, fig. 38.) In this part of the Netherlands, the river Rhine is called the Lower Rhine. While the soil of the Haarlemmermeer in the previous chapter was saline old sea clay, the area where *Baumschule #2* was made, is a large and unique area in the province of Gelderland, in the eastern part of the Netherlands, called the Betuwe. Here, the soil consists purely of river clay sediments, brought to this delta with the fresh meltwaters from glaciers and rainwater via rivers that originate in the inlands of Europe.³²⁷

To understand the area where De Ruijter made his photograph on the level of the ground form, it is relevant to know that from the beginning of the Holocene – around 11,000 years ago – several rivers had been eroding large channels in the delta landscape of the lowlands. In subsequent eras, when the rivers flowed more slowly, large amounts of material were transported and disposed causing the river valleys to fill up.³²⁸ The windblown sand, together with plant growth, resulted in deposits being heaped up the river banks, in turn causing hills that millennia later proved very attractive for artists.³²⁹ These hills did not exceed a height of around 80 metres. Because of the way they had come into existence – by the blowing of sand in the wind – these hills are called dunes, river dunes to be precise.³³⁰

During antiquity, the river area in the middle of the Netherlands formed the northern part of the Roman Empire – the Rhine was its northern 'limes'. Many of the memories, hidden in the land where *Baumschule #2* was made, but playing no visible role in the image, were formed by remains from Roman times, which are today being found in the area by archaeologists. When, from the fourth century A.D., the Romans gave up the area, it seems to have been left desolate during the major part of the Middle Ages. The documented history of the villages of Kesteren and Opheusden starts in the late Middle Ages.³³¹

In terms of the programmatic form, the river clay sediments determined the destination and current function of the Betuwe area, which, in turn, made De Ruijter choose this place and position his camera there.³³² The soil has a tight structure, a large water capacity, a high specific gravity and is not

³²⁷ 'Nederland. Geologie' ('Netherlands. Geology') in: *De Grote Bosatlas*, Groningen (Noordhoff) 2015, 54th edition, p. 31.

³²⁸ Section 'De bodem' ('The soil'), in Doorenbos 1950, pp. 12-13.

³²⁹ The only other area in the Netherlands with higher hills is the extreme southern corner of the Netherlands in the province of Limburg.

³³⁰ As opposed to the coastal dunes, which are to be found near the shores of the sea.

³³¹ All information in this section based on Doorenbos 1950, pp. 21-22.

³³² Conversation with the photographer on 1 June 2017.

very permeable; ideal conditions as it turns out for tree and fruit growing.³³³ Indeed, the Betuwe area is one of the few areas in the Netherlands that has been known for centuries for tree and fruit production – mainly apples, pears and cherries – and the products derived from it such as marmalades.³³⁴ Already in the seventeenth century, the Betuwe was called the 'apple cellar of Holland and Vriesland'.³³⁵ In addition, trees are grown for sale to private gardeners and many are sold to municipalities to be planted in public parks and gardens.³³⁶ What I see here in the photograph *Baumschule #2* by De Ruijter is indeed tree growing of exactly this kind.

In the Betuwe zone, fruit and tree growing intensified from the 1870s. This was paralleled by an intensification in trade, facilitated by improved transportation in the area and, in particular, the connection of Kesteren and Opheusden to the railway network.³³⁷ In the 1920s, transportation over land by vans improved, stimulating the fruit and tree trade further.³³⁸ The industrialization of fruit and tree growing was completed with the land consolidation that took place in Rivierenland from 1940 through 1990. In a decades-long process of swapping and buying, the patches of land per owner enlarged, allowing for an increase in the scale of growing. In 1959, the new division of the area around Kesteren and Opheusden into larger fields was completed.³³⁹

The enlarged tree nurseries had rigid geometrical patterns, making possible efficient, industrialized production. This can be seen clearly in the photographs by De Ruijter. His photographs are about industrialized tree growing – the title *Baumschule* means tree nursery and all the photographs show the lines and grids of systemised and industrialised floriculture. The artist preferred the German word for tree nursery over the Dutch word 'boomkwekerij' (tree nursery) purely for poetic reasons.³⁴⁰

With regard to Steenberg and Reh's spatial form, there are clearly aspects that made De Ruijter choose this location. In contrast to Baart, who had biographical reasons for choosing his subject (he grew up there), De Ruijter had no autobiographical agency with respect to the area photographed in *Baumschule #2*. He had never even been there before. Instead, he was searching for certain generic characteristics and conditions specific to that place: De Ruijter had been looking for areas in the Netherlands with intensive industrialised tree and fruit growing, but at the same time it had to be an open environment that allowed for the aerial device with the camera to fly around.³⁴¹

As to the intense agricultural use: a look at the map of the Betuwe informs the viewer about the intensity of the area between the Lower Rhine and Waal near Kesteren and Opheusden. The orchards

³³³ Section 'De bodem' ('The soil'), in Doorenbos 1950, p. 14.

³³⁴ The other area in the Netherlands famous for fruit growing is an area around the town of Boskoop in the province of South Holland. Boskoop is famous for its intensive greenhouse floriculture.

³³⁵ Bruijn and Doornmalen 2014, p. 56. Doorenbos mentions the year 1650 as the earliest written documentation of tree orchards near Opheusden; Doorenbos 1950, p. 39.

³³⁶ Conversation with the photographer on 21 March 2017, who learnt this from a conversation with one of the farmers of the Kesteren agricultural area.

³³⁷ Bruijn and Doornmalen 2014, pp. 52-53.

³³⁸ 'Geschiedenis', in: Corporate information of the Royal Fruit Masters Group, <https://www.fruitmasters.nl/Geschiedenis-27.html>, accessed on 10 March 2017.

³³⁹ Bruijn and Doornmalen 2014, pp. 68-69.

³⁴⁰ Conversation with the photographer on 10 March 2017.

³⁴¹ E-mail from the photographer to the author on 2 June 2017.

border each other, side by side, which makes the exploitation of the land as lucrative as possible. The commercial success of the area still determines its transformation: currently, any remaining cattle farms are also being changed into tree nurseries.³⁴² Furthermore, the location is clearly favourable due to its situation close to the parallel transportation lines of – from North to South – the Lower Rhine, the railroad between Tiel and Arnhem (with stops in both Kesteren and Opheusden), the A15 highway connecting to the world harbour of Rotterdam in the west and with Germany in the east and, finally, the River Waal which, like the Lower Rhine, is known for its intensive inland shipping. The spatial organisation and ordonnance is visible, and clearly facilitate and stimulate the optimal production and distribution of fruit and trees. Indeed, it has resulted in the intensive agriculture that was exactly what De Ruijter was looking for.

I asked the photographer to explain in more detail how he chooses his locations. In fact he studies the ground, programmatic and spatial forms of the landscape: exactly the aspects studied in this first research step of georeferencing.³⁴³ In order to choose his location, De Ruijter studies maps and reads literature on the use of the landscape, in this case tree growing. In addition, and with the aim of studying the spatial aspect of the landscape, he drives or walks around the physical landscape while taking photographs for use as study material. This process is repeated several times. As noticed before in the context of Baart's *Werklust*, this is comparable to the sketches made by the Dutch landscape painters, the most famous of which are the landscape drawings by Jan van Goyen. In fact, there are extant sketches of exactly this area near Rhenen, by Van Goyen.

The aspect of openness and accessibility are among the spatial aspects that determine whether a location is suitable for De Ruijter to make a photograph or not. On the one hand, this has to do with juridical/administrative aspects: who does this piece of land belong to, will the owner allow him to take his photographs? Are there any aggressive guard dogs or other factors preventing him from entering the place? On the other hand, it is about considering the physical conditions the photographer has to deal with: is there an access road? Are there gates or other obstacles to reaching the place? Are there any high buildings or trees standing in the way that could disturb the image field or the photographic process? Because of De Ruijter's method of taking his photographs from elevated altitudes, which can be as high as 100 metres, for him to make his photographs, the airspace must be as open and as safe as possible, to accommodate the manoeuvres of elevating his camera with a rod, kite or balloon. There should be no high buildings or trees in the vicinity, but also no power pylons and or high-voltage, which are quite common in the Netherlands. For these reasons, De Ruijter had before rejected a number of locations near Oudenbosch and Haaren in the southern province of North Brabant, as well as near Boskoop in the coastal province of South-Holland.³⁴⁴ The spatial aspect of this location near Rhenen, i.e. that it is open, empty and accessible, was key in De Ruijter choosing it as the spot for making

³⁴² Conversation with the photographer on 21 March 2017, who learnt this from a conversation with one of the farmers of the Kesteren agricultural area.

³⁴³ Conversation with the photographer on 1 June 2017 and an additional e-mail on the next day by him to the author.

³⁴⁴ E-mail of 2 June 2017 by the photographer to the author.

Baumschule #2.

Without De Ruijter being familiar with this place before, the ground, programmatic and spatial aspects of the location determined and steered his choice to position his camera in this exact location. This insight, namely, an awareness of how a landscape artwork is determined by and relates to its physical environment, is emphasised by phenomenology and emerges as a result of georeferencing the artwork.

3.2 looking away from riverscape

Whereas phenomenology inspires us to consider the physical environment from which the artwork emerges, Rosalind Krauss points out in 'Photography's Discursive Spaces' that photographs obtain their meaning in relation to other imagery of the same place. The study of this is the geospecific comparison I advocate and it evolves on the level that Steenbergen and Reh call the 'image form' of landscape.³⁴⁵ Moving to this second step, the geospecific comparison of *Baumschule #2* with imagery that exists of this specific place or area, reveals a rich tradition. While Baart, as discussed in the previous chapter, worked more or less on a tabula rasa because the physical landscape was new land relatively recently reclaimed from the water, for *Baumschule #2*, De Ruijter worked in an area that has a rich cultural memory. Or, to speak with Wells and the theory she points out in *Land Matters*, the landscape of the banks of the Lower Rhine in the area near Rhenen, Opheusden and Kesteren has strongly profiled formal and aesthetic conventions.

The area is a picturesque river landscape and was popular with landscape painters in the seventeenth century due to its previously mentioned geological history, which resulted in unique features: although never surpassing a height of 90 metres, this is one of the rare Dutch areas containing hills.³⁴⁶ In the otherwise flat landscape of the Netherlands, this area offered the landscape artist an unusual range of possibilities: to take a higher vantage point, to render diagonals in their compositions because of the hill slopes they could include in their composition, etc. The geographical imagination of the area, to use the words of Schwartz and Ryan, results from the fact that, in the seventeenth century, this area was the subject matter of many of the riverscapes that Dutch landscape painting is famous for.³⁴⁷

De Ruijter's photograph of a tree nursery in the snow, *Baumschule #2*, has little in common with these painted riverscapes. It certainly has no visual relationship to them. While the riverscapes show coulisse landscapes with central compositions and linear perspective with a horizon and a vanishing point, the elevated camera position of *Baumschule #2* diminishes the illusion of depth and deletes the

³⁴⁵ Steenbergen and Reh 1996, pp. 384-385.

³⁴⁶ Hills can only be found in the east of the province of Gelderland, towards the border with Germany, and in the southernmost part of the Netherlands in the tail of the province of Limburg. Only five of these hills are higher than 100 metres.

³⁴⁷ For the geographical imagination see Schwartz and Ryan 2003.

horizon, while further cropping transforms the photographed scene into an almost abstract patch of earth, mainly characterized by the modern grid in which the trees are planted. Moreover, the photographer was not aware of the visual history of the place, so from that point of view it can hardly be interpreted as a critical statement.³⁴⁸ *Baumschule #2*, however, is linked to the historical paintings of the Lower Rhine riverscapes by one clear and unalterable fact: it shares the same geographical location. Is this enough to make a sensible comparison? In my opinion, it is. This can be argued through theory from the discipline of cultural geography. In addition, the writings of Schwartz and Ryan from art and photography history, as well as those by Rosalind Krauss provide support for this.

Although an auxiliary science, cultural geography is a framework within which my research evolves. Returning to the theory I pointed out in chapter 1 helps to clarify this. The argument lies in the public's experience of the location and the cultural expressions they attach to it. As cultural geographers have pointed out, the meaning of a place is determined by memories, the stories that make a place. From the perspective of the artist, the maker of the memory, the story of the image of a place, this making of the cultural expression is a landscaping process. The cultural expression of a certain artist however, is not the only one. Over time, more artists produced verbal or visual memories which, from the perspective of the viewer, inhabitant or visitor of the place, constitute the meaning of the place.

As Schwarz and Ryan point out in *Picturing Place*, various photographic practices, be it touristic photography (including, I would argue, photographically reproduced paintings of places that are repeated and distributed as postcards) or domestic photography, together shape our perception of a place. They constitute and sustain both individual as well as collective notions of landscape and identity, which Schwartz and Ryan call 'imaginative geographies'.³⁴⁹

This links up to what Krauss wrote on the accumulation of 'views' that occurs with regard to 'points of interest' and as a result of which photographers necessarily have to position themselves.³⁵⁰ It also links up to the words of photographers about the stereotypical character of those places that have become so well-known through famous landscape paintings or touristic photography.³⁵¹ In this case, it is not necessary for the different authors to have been aware of each other's utterances. Whether the photographer was aware of the imagery of that place produced by his predecessors or not, from the viewpoint of the receiver, the viewer, the inhabitant or visitor of the place, the different images relate to each other. The study of these accumulations of different cultural expressions originate in cultural geography and together they form a multifaceted landscaping process that gives meaning to a particular location. The cultural geographical information systems manifest in, for example, GultGIS and the EUWATHER project that I referred to in 1.2.2 on theory and methodology of cultural geography, which focuses on mapping the multitude of memories and cultural expressions grouped per place.³⁵²

³⁴⁸ Conversation with the photographer on 1 June 2017.

³⁴⁹ Schwartz/Ryan 2003, p. 6.

³⁵⁰ Krauss 1985, p. 141.

³⁵¹ See the words of Misha de Ridder, Han Singels and Ellen Kooi quoted previously. They initially avoided these well-known and what they saw as clichéd landscapes, but later deliberately searched for them to explore and work with the content of the stereotypical landscape image.

³⁵² See the practice of Cultural Geographical Information Systems, abbreviated as GultGIS, which I referred to

In order to understand the juxtaposition of *Baumschule #2* to conventional imagery and the implications of this, I will first discuss some of the key works by important Dutch landscape artists who worked in exactly the same place as De Ruijter did. As previously mentioned, the river landscape of the middle of the Netherlands has always inspired artists. It has a unique character, strongly determined by the slow flowing of the wide rivers that pass through it. A painterly tradition of riverscapes emerged in the seventeenth century and this chapter will examine a number of famous examples from this genre. Until today, the river zone continues to inspire many artists. In 2009, filmmaker Jan Wouter van Reijen (b. 1943) made the film *Remembering Holland*. Officially, it is a documentary; however, beside interviews and informative scenes on the artists working in the area, a large part of the film is devoted to poetic images of the landscape of the Dutch river Waal, such as scenes of its flowing waters.³⁵³ The Dutch title of the film is the first phrase of the well-known poem *Herinnering aan Holland* ('Memory of Holland') of 1936 by Dutch poet Hendrik Marsman (1899-1940), in which the riverscape plays an important role. The first lines, often quoted in the Netherlands, are:

Thinking of Holland
I see wide-flowing rivers
slowly traversing
infinite plains,
inconceivably
rarefied poplars
like lofty plumes
on the skyline in lanes.³⁵⁴

The film is evocative of the cultural and emotional meaning the river and its landscape has for the people who live nearby or visit it. In terms of this research, the film illustrates how the many cultural expressions – including the film itself – make place of the Dutch river landscape.³⁵⁵

The formal and aesthetic conventions of the place, which, according to Wells, contribute to the meaning of the location that photographers build on and react to, have a strong basis in, again, seventeenth-century painting. Actually, the riverscape was established as a subgenre of landscape painting and 'Rivers and Canals' returns as one of the landscape categories in Stechow's *Dutch*

when listing the theories from cultural geography relevant for my research. See 1.2.2 of this dissertation.

³⁵³ Jan Wouter van Reijen, *Denkend aan Holland/Remembering Holland*, 101 min., doc. eye film, 2009, International Film Festival 2009.

³⁵⁴ 'Denkend aan Holland/zie ik breede rivieren/traag door oneindig/laagland gaan/rijen ondenkbaar/iijle populieren/als hoge pluimen/aan den einder staan'. See for the whole poem in Dutch: *Hendrik Marsman, Verzameld Werk (Collected Works) I, II, III* by Hendrik Marsman; The Hague 1938, volume III. Poem in Dutch and in a prize winning 2006 English translation by Paul Vincent: website of the David Reid Poetry Translation Prize: <http://www.subtexttranslations.com/drptp/hah/hah.html> (accessed on 9 March 2018).

³⁵⁵ See theory on space and place by Tuan, theory on place making in cultural geography by Creswell, and photography theory on place making as for example formulated by Helen Westgeest as defined in paragraph 1.1.2 and discussed in 1.2.2 of this dissertation. Tuan 1975, pp. 164-165; Creswell 2004, pp. 7-9. Westgeest 2009, p. 73.

Landscape Painting.³⁵⁶ Stechow mentions the compositorial problems of combining land and water and urges us to discern waterscapes as a separate landscape category. He also alludes to the special atmosphere of the riverscape that has long-inspired artists:

[...] whoever has taken the effort to walk, or travel at something like seventeenth-century speed, along one of [the Dutch waterways], will have been struck by the wonders of the water flowing gently on or above his own level, with boats floating on it as on air, with magnificent skies vaulting over the flat pastures, and with those tender reflections of trees, farm buildings, boats and the sky on the calm surface of the water.³⁵⁷

While there is no water to be seen in De Ruijter's photograph *Baumschule #2*, it is relevant for the understanding of the area where he made this picture, including understanding what have always been the key characteristics for it in visual communication. These are also key characteristics of the formal and aesthetic conventions of the place. In other words, it is relevant to know which famous characteristics typify the place De Ruijter photographed, like those of the Dutch river landscape formulated by Stechow in his book, despite the fact that he deliberately chose to leave them out of his frame.

De Ruijter's avoidance of the conventional characteristics of the rivers in the landscape of the Betuwe and thus also of the formal and aesthetic conventions of the place, relates to another aspect of the area especially around Rhenen, Opheusden and Kesteren: the fact that this is one of the few hilly terrains in the Netherlands. Although Dutch hills are not high – Grebbeberg, which lies just east of Rhenen, on the northern bank of the Lower Rhine, is 52 m high – they do allow artists to adopt a higher viewpoint.³⁵⁸ As a result, it is not surprising that in his book *Dutch Landscape Painting*, Stechow describes the area where *Baumschule #2* was taken as a place that has induced artists to produce pictures in another of his categories: panoramas. Stechow refers to two panoramas by key Dutch landscape painter Jan van Goyen, made in the same place as *Baumschule #2*: two views of Rhenen, one from 1636 (in a private collection) and one from 1646 (in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington).³⁵⁹ (Fig. 3.4)

³⁵⁶ Stechow 1968 [1966], pp. 50-64.

³⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 50.

³⁵⁸ The small dimensions of one of the highest points in the country illustrates the flatness and low-lying position of the Netherlands. The highest hill in the environment of Rhenen is the Amerongse Berg, which is 69 m high. The highest point of the Netherlands is in the far south of the country, the Vaalserberg, 323 metres, on the borders with Belgium and Germany. Many parts of the western Netherlands are below sea level.

³⁵⁹ Both views of Rhenen changed owner since Stechow published his book in 1968. The View of Rhenen of 1636 was, at that time, part of the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but sold by that museum in 1978. It was subsequently sold several times and, through an acquisition by a Dutch collector, ended up in Douwes Art Gallery in Amsterdam, where it still is now. See <http://www.douwesfineart.com/object-profile/56>, accessed on 10 March 2017. Van Goyen's View of Rhenen of 1646 was, in Stechow's time, part of the collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, which was dissolved in 2014. Its 17,000-object collection was donated to the National Gallery of Art in Washington and this is still the home to Van Goyen's painting. See Randy Kennedy, 'Corcoran Gallery Art Transforms National Gallery', New York Times, 5 February 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/06/arts/design/corcoran-gallery-art-transforms-national-gallery.html?_r=0, accessed on 20 March 2017. This article appeared in the paper version of the newspaper on 6 February 2015 on p. C29, according to the website. For the record of the 1646 painting in the National Gallery's image base, see



Fig. 3.4 Jan van Goyen, *View of Rhenen*, 1646, oil on canvas, 101 x 136.5 cm, coll. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Stechow praises the 1636 painting for, amongst other things, how 'the silvery, meandering river leads more convincingly into a distance radiant with atmospheric delights.'³⁶⁰ The very patch of land that De Ruijter photographed is visible in Van Goyen's 1636 painting, in the background across the Rhine river. In the 1646 painting, this same location is visible in the far left, across the river. The aerial photographic approach to the land by De Ruijter clearly contrasts with the atmospheric bliss Van Goyen depicted in his painting and Stechow described in his 1966 book. The paintings show suggestions of perspective, as prescribed by Van Mander in 1604 to ensure that paintings make the eye of the beholder wander from the foreground towards the vanishing point. In order to better understand this, I must go a little deeper into the important writing of Van Mander.

Van Mander wrote a very early prescriptive treatise on landscape painting. In 1604, he published his famous *Schilder-boeck* ('Book of Painting'), which provided descriptions of, but also inspiration for and instructions to the painters and graphic artists of that time. The book contains descriptions of the lives of painters, comparable with Giorgio Vasari's *Le Vite* (1550, revised and expanded edition in 1568) about Italian Renaissance painters. More relevant here are Van Mander's art theoretical chapters, which also include the chapter 'Van het Landschap' ('Of Landscape'), devoted entirely to the composition of landscapes.³⁶¹

Van Mander wrote concrete guidelines for artists, which had an impact on the final appearance of their works. His writings therefore offer an insight into the basic characteristics of the Dutch landscape paintings of the Golden Age, and how these elements entered the tradition of landscape painting at their origin. Van Mander's general instructions – not confined to the genre of landscape

<http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.139354.html>

³⁶⁰ Stechow 1968 [1966], p. 41.

³⁶¹ Mander 1604, chapter 8, 'Van het Landschap'. English translations of terms: MvdH.

painting – included guidelines for measure and proportion, all deduced from the laws of nature. These laws should be known and adopted, but at the same time should not be held on to too rigidly: the image as a whole should be saturated with 'gracy' (grace) and 'playsancy' (attractiveness). A certain abundancy in subjects and motives should be applied in pictures with variety ('wisselingh', 'verscheydenheyt'), resulting in a 'schoon Harmonye' (beautiful harmony). Van Mander sets the standard by sketching an 'ordinancy', a composition, that meets his guidelines. The composition of such a landscape should feature:

- in the left and right foreground, there should be some figures or architectural elements
- the middle of the scene should be left quite open
- figures that are placed in the middle foreground should lie down or be seated in order to leave space for a view through, a vista, towards a further situated background.
- this secondary background should contain smaller figures and also some view throughs (vistas) that reach to the horizon, which leads the view to penetrate the scene from the foreground towards the vanishing point in the background.³⁶²

Reading Van Mander's instructions gives us further insight into the conventions of Dutch landscape painting that today's photographers might be reacting to. Van Mander devotes the whole first sub-chapter to light, including an important role for colour, and optical phenomena like the reflection of sunlight on the physical landscape, perspective, mirroring reflections and atmosphere. He notices how the horizon is not sharp but fuzzy, how ditches and furrows strengthen the effect of depth in a picture, how the sun casts shadows on buildings and mountains, and how the sky is reflected in water surfaces. In the tradition of the moralistic instructional writing of that time, Van Mander repeatedly urges painters to appreciate summer's early morning because of its most beautiful appearance. Indeed, he advises young painters to get up early in the morning during summer and leave the city early.³⁶³ Apparently, Van Mander's concept of landscape does not include the cityscape. Out of town, in the countryside, the artists can enjoy the beauty of living nature and, at the same time, they can observe and study the many views that will later inform their painting of landscapes. The countryside is also where Aelbert Cuyp takes us in his panoramic painting of the surroundings of Rhenen. He, too, encourages us to enjoy the beauty of this place, in his painting featuring horse riders that the viewer can identify with. Compared to this writing and to the paintings like those of Van Goyen, *Baumschule #2* is similar insofar as it also features organic nature, in the form of the trees as. However, these natural elements are not positioned casually over the space like the elements in the paintings, displaying the variety required by Van Manders. Rather, these trees are positioned in a rigid grid, which is the result of industrial farming.

The second part of Van Mander's chapter on landscape explains how to depict a good spatial division in landscape paintings. The basal area should be divided into four grounds or plans, inarticulately connected to each other by curved lines. Large houses should be avoided in the foreground, instead there should be some beautiful plants. Van Mander goes on to elaborate on the

³⁶² Ibidem, vs 15-22.

³⁶³ Mander 1604, chapter 8, 'Van het Landschap', vs 1-3.

ordonnance of elements in the space of the landscape. Again, he reiterates the importance of variety, but warns the artist to remain modest.³⁶⁴ This is epitomised in what Van Mander calls 'welstandigheid', beauty, but this is less relevant for this study because it is not an evaluative term. Van Mander gives examples of painters who deal well with measure and ordonnance: in addition to the Italian painters Tintoretto and Titian, he mentions the Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel. In fact, Van Mander presents Bruegel as a successor to the Roman painter Ludius, from classical antiquity, in a mental intervention typical of Renaissance thinking.³⁶⁵ The ordonnance of the elements in De Ruijter's photograph could not contrast more with the examples Van Mander praises: there is little depth to be seen in the space, which as a result of the tilting and elevated vantage point of the camera has been diminished to almost nil. There is no sense of depth in the ordering of the position of the trees.

It is interesting to learn about landscape conventions from Van Mander's words about scenic motives: first meadows, brooks and fields, with their buildings and constructions, then mountains (which are absent in the Dutch landscape, apart from the dunes and some hills) and finally human figures. Referring to Ludius, he praises the addition of elements and motives of country life: country houses, farms, vineyards, roads, dense woods, hills, ponds, brooks, rivers, harbours and beaches.³⁶⁶ Van Mander suggests that the figures in the land could be depicted in the act of ploughing, mowing, fishing, boating or hunting.³⁶⁷ Everything that Van Mander describes and prescribes for painted landscapes is highly applicable and visible in the two aforementioned *Views of Rhenen* by Van Goyen, but has been totally rejected by De Ruijter. Instead, the photographer creates a flat two-dimensional surface in his image with almost no suggestion of depth.³⁶⁸

The area where De Ruijter has been working, near Rhenen, Kesteren and Opheusden, was a very popular destination for some of the greatest artists of the seventeenth century, who specialized in the landscape genre and worked according to Van Mander's theories. Born in Dordrecht, in the southwest of Holland, painter Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691) came to Rhenen several times from 1642 and made a beautiful painting of two horseback riders making a stop to enjoy the view over the Rhine and the river land. It is a literal visualization of what Tuan calls making a stop in the stream of activities to endow a place with more value.³⁶⁹ The two men look exactly towards the place where De Ruijter made his *Baumschule #2* in 2009. (Fig. 3.5) Thus, through art history in general and paintings such as this one by Cuyp in particular, the location in the physical landscape of *Baumschule #2* was already 'made into place'.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁴ Van Mander warns artists not to be too abundant ('overvloedich'). Mander 1604, chapter 8, 'Van het Landschap', vs 23.

³⁶⁵ Ibidem, vs. 43.

³⁶⁶ Boeren Huysen, Hoeven, Wijngaerden, dreven/Oock dichte Bosschen, en Heuvels verheven, vyvers, Beken, vloeden, Havens, en stranden', Mander 1604, hoofdstuk 8, vs 43.

³⁶⁷ Ibidem.

³⁶⁸ Mander 1604, chapter 8, 'Van het Landschap', vs 15-22.

³⁶⁹ Tuan 1977, p. 6.

³⁷⁰ This refers to place in the sense of a 'meaningful place', as explained for example by Creswell in Creswell 2004, pp. 7-9 and discussed in this dissertation in 1.2.2.



Fig. 3.5 Aelbert Cuyp, *Two dismounted riders at the Koningstafel on the Heimenberg near Rhenen; with a view over the Lower Rhine river in the direction of Opheusden*, ca. 1646-1648
oil on panel, 32.9 x 42.5 cm, private collection / courtesy of Sotheby's

This painting by Cuyp complies with the habits and rules of landscape painting, which at that time had been valid since the beginning of that century. In the painting by Aelbert Cuyp, the horse riders, in their 'recreational act' of looking over the area between Rhenen, Kesteren and Opheusden, are clearly enjoying the beauty of the panoramic view over the landscape and the spot where De Ruijter photographed with his kite in 2009. Less a panorama and more like a river landscape, the area was also depicted by painter Jan van Goyen in 1652, in his habit of repeatedly painting the same place; this painting now forms part of the Dutch State Heritage Collection.

There is even a version of the same Dutch river landscape near Rhenen by painter of the seventeenth century riverscape par excellence: Salomon van Ruysdael. He, like the other painters mentioned, came from the western, flat part of Holland. Aside from the fact that the commissioners of these paintings must have known the area, the compositions of these scenes suggest a fascination, on the part of the artist, with the hilliness, which causes diagonal lines and the wide vistas over the Rhine towards atmospheric southern horizons. (fig. 3.6) These are all aspects that De Ruijter omitted from his photograph, but which form the collective visual memory of the area.



Fig. 3.6 Salomon van Ruysdael, *Landscape with view on Rhenen*, 1659
oil on canvas, 70.2 x 111.2 cm, coll. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

While I do not make an exact comparison between historic paintings and their reconstructed and rephotographed location, as in the research of Ernst Bos discussed in paragraph 1.3.2 on geospecific comparison, I do believe a comparison of De Ruyter's photograph with the paintings from the Golden Age is possible and relevant.³⁷¹ This exercise reveals that the relatively empty land in the environs of the rolling hills of Rhenen have turned into intensely structured, systemised and cultivated land for industrialized floriculture, with intense patterns and grids that facilitate massive agricultural production. Although De Ruijter's choice to photograph intensive horticulture was a generic one, and not influenced by biography or familiarity, his subject matter and viewpoint draws our attention towards this phenomenon, which is close to the traditionally popular and much-depicted parts and aspects of the Dutch riverscape.

Geospecific comparison, as advocated by Wölflin and other formalists since the beginning of the twentieth century, with paintings like those of Van Goyen, Ruysdael and Cuyp, teaches us that De Ruijter does not accord with what Wells, in *Land Matters*, calls the 'formal and aesthetic conventions' of the area near Rhenen, Opheusden and Kesteren in the Betuwe. As we have seen in this paragraph, the conventions are visualized by, amongst others, seventeenth-century Dutch paintings by famous landscape painters like Cuyp, Van Ruysdael and Van Goyen, who are represented in major art collections in the world while their paintings determine the collective memory of the place. De Ruijter radically breaks with these conventions thus problematising the making of place of the river landscape near Rhenen.

In this case, he problematises the making of place through executing aerial photography. However, further geospecific comparison reveals that not every type of aerial photography results in the same radically different pictures, as the images created by Siebe Swart demonstrate. (Fig. 3.7) Swart has devoted his work to the making of aerial photography in, in his words, 'The Dutch landscape and the built environment'.³⁷² Tree nurseries, along with almost every other subject in the Dutch landscape, appear in his work. Indeed, one picture of tree nurseries in the land of Meuse and Waal even shows tree nurseries in the same area De Ruijter photographed his *Baumschule #2*. (Fig. 3.7)

³⁷¹ See Bos 2015.

³⁷² Welcome text on front page of the website of the photographer Siebe Swart himself, <http://www.siebeswart.nl/> accessed on 29 March 2017.



Fig. 3.7 Siebe Swart, *Land of Meuse and Waal, Netherlands*, 27 May 2013, digital photograph, collection of the photographer

[Additional info by the photographer: The low and wet land between the rivers Maas and Waal, central Netherlands has been developed in the fifties by large-scale land consolidation and education, development and training of the residents. One of the main roads along the farms.]

In Swart's picture, the position of the tree nurseries in the river landscape of the central-east Netherlands becomes clear through the river in the background.

The photographs by Swart have great aesthetic quality and sometimes approach geometrical images like those of De Ruijter. Like De Ruijter, Swart's work has been acknowledged in the museum circuit and he has had monographical exhibitions in museum spaces.³⁷³ However, a difference with De Ruijter's aerial pictures is that the emphasis in Swart's work lies on information on and documentation of the Dutch landscape – his image base is highly informed by scenic and spatial developments and approachable through a large variety of specialised terms of landscape phenomena. Because Swart uses the bird's-eye view more than the totally vertical perspective of De Ruijter, his images retain a scenic character. Interestingly, the aerial photograph by Swart also shows the grid of the tree nurseries in the foreground that I know from *Baumschule #2*, but the organically shaped riverscape in the background is very much that of the riverscapes of the Golden Age. Swart's photograph thus clarifies

³⁷³ See, for example, *Siebe Swart: Land of Air and Water. Aerial photographs of Dutch Water Works*, an exhibition in Huis Marseille, Museum for Photography in Amsterdam from 16 December 2011 through 26 February 2012.

how the two very different looking scenes relate to each other in the physical landscape.

The aerial photographs by De Ruijter are more radical, taken vertically and directed towards the ground. As becomes clear from the many other pictures taken by him, this is an extreme and consciously chosen approach. The concept is visible in, for example, the other photographs in the *Baumschule* series, like *Baumschule #24*, also taken in the same area of Kesteren and Opheusden. (Fig. 3.8)



Fig. 3.8 Gerco de Ruijter, *Baumschule #24*, October 2009, chromogenic print on dibond, 110 x 110 cm, coll. the artist photograph made of tree nursery - like *Baumschule #2* - near Rehnen, Kesteren, Opheusden, in the clay ground of river landscape.

This photograph also isolates the rigid lines of the systemised agricultural landscape of the tree nurseries in the river clay ground, leaving the atmospheric river views, the hills and the panoramic views from higher hill slopes out of the frame – even though these features had been determining the formal and aesthetic conventions of this place for centuries since the Golden Age.

In fact, De Ruijter was ignorant of the fact that many painters had visualized the river landscape he was working in.³⁷⁴ On seeing the reproductions of the paintings, which I sent to him when informing him about my research, he said he recognised the landscape and hilly horizon, which he had seen out of the corner of his eye when he was there. If we are to follow the line of thoughts about the geographical imagination formulated by Schwartz and Ryan in *Picturing Place*, it makes sense to relate *Baumschule #2* to the paintings depicting the same place. It articulates the type of image that De

³⁷⁴ Conversation with the photographer on 31 May 2017.

Ruijter's work visually contradicts.³⁷⁵

In conclusion, this second step of geospecific comparison has revealed that, on the level of Steenberg and Reh's image form, *Baumschule #2* problematises the former making of place of the area by framing radically different subjects and features of the highly industrialised tree nurseries, compared to the meandering river vistas with hilly slopes, which are more common. De Ruijter thus juxtaposes a different image opposite the conventional imagery of the riverscape that was established centuries before by famous Dutch landscape painters like Cuyp, Van Goyen and Van Ruysdael. The way De Ruijter does this, that is, to which photographic intervention I can compare his approach, and what effect his intervention has on the perception of this place of the beholder is the subject of the next paragraph.

3.3 framing delirious geometrical abstraction

In the third research step, geogeneric comparison, I will analyse the photographic intervention by the photographer, of which the photograph is witness and result. To put it differently, I try to discover what the photographer 'did to' the area of the tree nurseries in the Betuwe to make it look this way. To do this, I will compare *Baumschule #2* with images not of exactly the same location – as is apt in the two previous steps of the geospecific comparison – but of other locations of the same *kind* that are analogous to *Baumschule #2*. As I pointed out in Chapter 1 and as applied to *Werklust* by Baart, in line with the more-than-representational vision of cultural geography of writers like Creswell, I will also interpret *Baumschule #2* in terms of a landscaping process. The photographic intervention and process is thus understood as a process executed by the photographer, to render meaning to the depicted place.

At first sight, it seems difficult to perceive such a still picture in terms of an activity or process, as the practicing of place, formulated by De Certeau and referred to by Van Gelder in *Take Place* (2009).³⁷⁶ Nor is the singular, still picture easy to understand in terms of the environmental interaction between man and land that Carl Sauer and Kenneth Olwig write about.³⁷⁷ After all, *Baumschule #2* is almost antithetical to the kind of images in Baart's *Werklust*. I would like to make use of Bazin's theory on centripetal versus centrifugal images to explain this: Whereas the photobook by Baart was a centrifugal, exploring and outbound multi-image project, comparable with the way Victor Burgin interprets the experience of a panorama, *Baumschule #2* is a singular, tableau-like image that should be understood as an inwardly directed, still, framed image.³⁷⁸ Bazin used the term 'tableau-like' in relation to paintings; however, the way De Ruijter conceives, produces and presents his photograph as a tableau-like framed image, monumentally displayed on the wall, justifies our application of Bazin's approach to the

³⁷⁵ See the introduction on 'geographical imagination' and 'imaginative geographies', Schwartz and Ryan 2003, pp. 5-6.

³⁷⁶ In: Westgeest 2009, p. 73.

³⁷⁷ Olwig 1996, p. 630.

³⁷⁸ Burgin 2009 [2005], pp. 303-304; Bazin 2005 [1971], p. 55.

photographic artworks of De Ruijter.

As a whole, the *Baumschule* series is not to be understood as a series of photographs in the sense of a photo reportage, i.e. as a picture story whose photographs have to be perceived in a serial, consecutive way. The static singular photograph, *Baumschule #2* is also difficult to discuss in Creswell's terms of processes of interaction between man and land. Nevertheless, at the end of this chapter I will engage with this concept. And, as will become clear, key to this argument is Burgin's theory on choice of viewpoint and framing, as is Hito Steyerl's theory on the transformation of the linear perspective into a vertically downward one.³⁷⁹ Before reaching this step of geogeneric comparison, however, I will compare the correspondences that *Baumschule #2* has with other landscape types than those typical for the geographical imagination and conventional imagery of the Betuwe. I will do this on the level of Steenbergen and Reh's image form.

Using the table of concordance (see 1.3.3), which discerns which landscape types of the Dutch physical landscape are related to Stechow's landscape types in the genre of landscape art, the location of *Baumschule #2* can be counted as a river area. This corresponds with Stechow's category of 'Rivers and Canals'. Also, the trees in the picture mean that I can include De Ruijter's photograph in Stechow's 'Woods' category.³⁸⁰ Both have extended pictorial traditions. The snow in the photograph *Baumschule #2* allows us to include the photograph in a subcategory of 'Woods', located in the overlap with Stechow's category 'Winter', which has its own rich pictorial tradition: woods with snow. By comparing De Ruijter's *Baumschule #2* with landscapes of other places, specifically the two landscape types 'Rivers and Canals' and 'Woods with Snow', I get further insight into the way De Ruijter renders meaning to the piece of land in the Betuwe.

Comparing first the aerial photograph by De Ruijter with the formal and aesthetic conventions of the landscape type 'Rivers and Canals', brings us to the pictorial tradition of painted riverscapes. The artistic landscape type of the Dutch riverscape is internationally known. Especially seventeenth-century views of Dutch rivers are hanging in the landscape rooms of the most important museums worldwide. In the previous paragraph on comparison with older pictures of the river area of the Betuwe, I already referred to the work of a number of famous Dutch riverscape painters (see 1.3.2). The artist par excellence of the Dutch riverscape was Salomon van Ruysdael. His composition of the river curve with the silhouette of the ferryboat halfway across it, was constitutive to the convention of many river views. As we can read in Jenny Reynaerts essay in *Der Weite Blick*, nineteenth-century painters prolonged and developed this tradition of Dutch landscape painting, including the painting of riverscapes.³⁸¹ Although the environment of *Baumschule #2* near the Lower Rhine is a river landscape exactly of the type depicted in a painting by Van Ruysdael, it is clearly not the convention that De Ruijter is attuned with.

Photography that links to the tradition of landscape painting looks different. At the end of the

³⁷⁹ Burgin 1982 [1980], p. 146; Steyerl 2011.

³⁸⁰ Stechow 1968 [1966]. The categories, as I discussed in 1.2.1 and processed in my 'Van den Heuvel method' in 1.4, determine the structure of Stechow's book *Dutch Landscape Painting of the Seventeenth Century*.

³⁸¹ Reynaerts 2008.

nineteenth century, pictorialist photographers from abroad visited the Netherlands,³⁸² often inspired by Dutch landscape paintings that were exhibited abroad. Scottish photographer James Craig Annan and American photographer Alfred Stieglitz visited Holland and made photographic landscapes that were much inspired by painted landscapes and thus connected to the pictorial tradition. De Ruijter, however, did not try to emulate Dutch landscape painting of the pictorialists, by copying compositions or executing expressive printing techniques.³⁸³ This becomes clear when I compare *Baumschule* to the work of Dutch photographers like Han Singels (b. 1942) or L.J.A.D. Creyghton (b. 1954), who deliberately strive to emulate Dutch landscape painting.³⁸⁴

The same is true of the formal and visual conventions of the 'Woods' landscape type. Using this category allows us to make a geogeneric comparison to imagery of other woods. Although concentrated on the German cultural understanding of this category, an interesting reference is the multifaceted exhibition and book *Unter Bäumen: Die Deutschen und der Wald* produced by the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin in 2011.³⁸⁵ Emerging from this project are many notions that Dutch culture shares with its German neighbour, including Romanticism and folkloristic/fairytale storytelling.³⁸⁶ However, it should be noted that the German style of managing woods and trees in order to render them sustainable for future generations, as mentioned in, for example, *Unter Bäumen*, never turns into the extreme industrialisation of nature that is at stake in the Dutch landscape, as is visible in De Ruijter's photographs.³⁸⁷

Regarding the Netherlands, again, seventeenth-century painting was decisive in founding formal and aesthetic conventions for the depiction of woods. The collection of the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam provides us with an example from the Ruisdael family: this time, a painting by the nephew of Salomon, the landscape painter Jacob van Ruisdael. (Fig. 3.9)³⁸⁸

³⁸² Mattie Boom writes about this phenomenon in Boom 2012.

³⁸³ On the development of the pictorial landscape genre in photography, see also Heuvel 2015.

³⁸⁴ See the exhibition on nineteenth-century Dutch impressionist landscape painter *Willem Maris. Impressionist of the Hague School* in the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (2012), to which photographs by Han Singels were added to show how the painterly landscape tradition is still current in photography (Singels' photographs are not included in the catalogue). A key collection of L.J.A.D. Creyghton's photographs is published in his photobook *Holland Album* (2005).

³⁸⁵ Breymayer et al. 2011.

³⁸⁶ See the section 'Waldkunst', especially the articles 'Der deutsche Wald in Malerei und Grafik' by Andreas Bernhard and 'Der Wald in deutschen Fotografie' by Klaus Honnef. Breymayer et al. 2011, pp. 106-197.

³⁸⁷ Regarding Germany, this is subject of the section 'Waldwirtschaft', Breymayer et al. 2011, pp. 54-103.

³⁸⁸ The different spelling of a name within one family occurred more often in the Netherlands before Napoleon standardised and registered the fixed spelling of family names in the Netherlands in the eighteenth century. The standard for the spelling of the names of Dutch artists is determined by the Dutch RKD - Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague - and published on the internet through lists and databases on www.rkd.nl/artists.



Fig. 3.9 Jacob van Ruisdael, *Wooded river landscape with drinking cattle*, 1665, oil on canvas, 111 x 154 cm, coll Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, inv. no. 1747.

The combination of trees and a nearby river makes this picture suitable for geogeneric comparison with *Baumschule #2*. However, it immediately becomes clear as well that there is no hint of resemblance between this organically shaped vista, with curved lines that guide the eyes of the viewer towards the vanishing point in the idyllic distance, with the geometrically shaped and flat surface in De Ruijter's photograph.

In terms of subject matter, the trees in the white snow connect *Baumschule #2* with images of another subcategory of 'Woods', which overlaps with Stechow's category 'Winter': woods with snow. An example of this subcategory, with which *Baumschule #2* shares a motive, is a watercolour by Dutch painter Willem Witsen (1860-1923). (Fig. 3.10) This category is attractive among artists because of the graphic qualities of the white surfaces of the snow, which contrast with the dark contours of the trees and their branches.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁹ See for these preferences in the photography of Willem Witsen: Leijerzapf 1988a.



Fig. 3.10 Willem Witsen, *Trees in the snow*, ca. 1870-ca. 1923, Black chalk, brush in water colour, 36.2 x 43.8 cm, Rijksmuseum, RP-T-1978-33

The wood with snow motive was a favourite of Dutch artist Louis Apol (1850-1936). Like Witsen, he painted views of woods and trees in the snow and established a name as a painter of winter scenes.³⁹⁰ Also like Witsen, and like another well-known Dutch impressionist (albeit he was more famous for photographing city views), George H. Breitner (1857-1923), Apol made photographic studies of his subjects as preparation for his paintings.³⁹¹ One in particular, a painting which is documented by the RKD, of which the depicted geographical location is unknown, but shows a view of a wood, covered by snow. (Fig. 3.11)

³⁹⁰ Leijerzapf 1988.

³⁹¹ Soepboer 2016.



Fig. 3.11 Louis Apol, *Solitude [Eenzaamheid]*, 1884, oil on canvas, 110 x 84 cm, whereabouts unknown (last seen on auction C.F. Roos in 1913)

Its title is 'Solitude', suggesting the winter woods symbolise the absence of life and, with that, loneliness. The kind of generic, poetic title for this landscape is typical of the impressionistic landscapes produced at the dawn of modernism. Slowly, in this period, sensitivity for light effects, composition of dark and light surfaces and graphical elements came to dominate the two-dimensional surface. The title of De Ruijter's *Baumschule* series shares a poetic dimension with the title of this painting by Apol.

However, Apol's study clearly show the central composition around the vista in the middle of the picture, which leads the beholder's gaze to the vanishing point. This work still follows the guidelines for landscape painting set out by Van Mander.³⁹²

³⁹² The passage on landscape painting, discussed in 1.1.2 of this dissertation, is: Van Mander 1604, *Schilder-Boeck, Grondt*, VIII, vs 15-22.



Fig. 3.12 Louis Apol, photographic landscape study of woods in snow, 1885-1895, daylight silver print, 11.3 x 15.5 cm, coll. Leiden University Library, inv. no. PK-F-81.335

One of Apol's later photographs, in the collection of Leiden University, shows a more extreme modernist tendency in making the snow in the foreground a separate white surface with a dominant compositional position of its own. (Fig. 3.12) In this regard, it resembles the painted woods by Witsen. (Fig. 45) The picture approaches the modernist graphic look of the trees in the snow of De Ruijter, although it clearly lacks the radical geometry of *Baumschule #2*.

These geospecific and geogeneric comparisons of De Ruijter's photograph with historical paintings have revealed that he not only worked in an area loaded with pictorial history and tradition, but also worked in a tradition with a rich art historical past: the tradition of the woods covered with snow motive. However poetic the associations of the ingredients of the woods and the snow in De Ruijter's *Baumschule #2*, the plain geometry of the aerial photograph has not resulted in an atmospheric picture of the type of the impressionist painters Witsen and Apol.³⁹³

There is another aspect that makes De Ruijter's photographs by different from those by Apol and Witsen: the latter artists did not consider photography as an art form. This is well described by photo historian Ingeborg Leijerzapf in the introduction to her article on Willem Witsen:

In his free time, Witsen was a passionate practitioner of photography. In contrast to most of the painters who photographed at this time—who were secretive about their photographic activity for fear of being seen as copyists of photos, among them George Breitner—Witsen was

³⁹³ Compare to the photography of the painters Witsen and Apol in Leijerzapf 1988a and 1988b respectively.

relatively open about his endeavours in this area. Nevertheless, his photos were circulated only among his private circle of family and friends, for whom they were taken.³⁹⁴

In the Netherlands, in the nineteenth century, photography was not considered part of the profession of a painter. Unlike artists from the Barbizon school of early-modernist landscape painting, Dutch painters, who had a lot in common with them artistically, did not show the same interest in photography. Indeed, whereas in France there was an exchange and publicly shown or discussed visual dialogue between painting and photography, no such phenomenon emerged in the Netherlands.³⁹⁵ In clear contrast, De Ruijter specifically directs his photographic efforts towards the museum and gallery circuit, conceiving and launching his monumental photographs explicitly as artworks.

A concept closer to De Ruijter's *Baumschule #2* is an image by another photographer in the modernist tradition, Albert Renger-Patzsch (1897-1966), who also discovered the graphic qualities of planted trees in the snow. (Fig. 3.13) Geogeneric comparison of De Ruijter's photograph with Renger-Patzsch's photograph *Fir Trees in Winter* (1956) shows clear similarities. Unlike the impressionist photographers, Renger-Patzsch and De Ruijter chose a less naturally shaped and clearly geometrically planted artificial kind of woodlands: trees stand in the straight rows of so-called production woods. The choice of production woods is no coincidence: in both pictures the straight lines in which the trees are positioned are of key compositorial importance.



Fig. 3.13 Albert Renger-Patzsch, *Fir Trees in Winter*, 1956
courtesy Ubu Gallery, New York

However systemised the picture by Renger-Patzsch is, in comparison to those by Witsen and Apol, it still shows the linear perspective and vista towards the vanishing point we know from conventional

³⁹⁴ Leijerzapf 1998a. The introductory paragraph of the section 'discussion', her quoted from the Dutch version of the article on <http://journal.depthoffield.eu/vol05/nr08/f02nl/en> (accessed on 17 March 2017).

³⁹⁵ Heuvel 2015, section 'The Hague School of Painting', <http://journal.depthoffield.eu/vol06/nr01/a03/en>, accessed on 17 March 2017.

landscape painting, while the black-and-white branches in the upper part of the photograph form a hazy cloud reminiscent of the poetry of romanticism.³⁹⁶ Predecessors to those photographs that focus on the extreme geometrisation and industrialisation in landscapes are to be found in a more recent movement in photography: the German Düsseldorf Schule.³⁹⁷

The influential Düsseldorf Schule emerged in photography in the 1980s, inspired by Bernd and Hilla Becher, two of the contributors to the *New Topographics* exhibition.³⁹⁸ From 1976, the Becher taught at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where their students included famous photographers such as Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Candida Höfer, Thomas Ruff and Axel Hütte. The Becher's taught these students to focus in particular on themes from the man-made cultural landscape, such as urban, suburban and industrial areas, and aspects such as artificiality, seriality and systemisation in the human environment.³⁹⁹ The Düsseldorf Schule, like De Ruijter, also worked in monumental sizes for photographic exhibition prints.

The photographers of the Düsseldorf Schule became known – simultaneously with photographers from the American continent such as Jeff Wall – for the enlargement of their exhibition prints to sometimes extreme sizes many metres wide.⁴⁰⁰ With these monumental photographic artworks they conquered the museum spaces that had previously been the realm of traditional painting. Photographers of the Düsseldorf Schule often stylised their very detailed and sharply focused photography into geometrical, symmetric compositions. The monumental size of the exhibition print as artwork, the focus on human systemisation and industrialisation of the environment and nature, and the strongly geometric and symmetrical composition of *Baumschule #2* makes the image of De Ruijter akin with the photography of the artists of the Düsseldorf Schule.

The 1990s and the first decades of the twenty-first century witnessed a growing global interest within photography in the role, position and influence of man in landscape. *Wasteland. Landscape From Now On* in Rotterdam in 1992, *Ecotopia* in New York in 2006, *Terra Cognita* in Groningen in 2012 and *Sense of Place. European Landscape Photography* in Brussels in the same year and *Mijn Vlakke Land. On Photography and Landscape* in Antwerp in 2015, are only some of the significant and elaborate artistic and curatorial efforts that marked this intensified interest.⁴⁰¹ Interest in man-made and man-controlled environment, highlighted by the Düsseldorf Schule, was now ubiquitous. Interest in the cultural landscape varied from neutral documentary studies and delirious spectacles of geometry and massiveness like those of prominent Düsseldorf Schule alumnus Andreas Gursky, to committed

³⁹⁶ A painting of the German Romanticism showing such a cloud of branches is for example *Der Chasseur im Walde* (1814) by Caspar David Friedrich, oil on canvas, 65.7 x 46.7 cm, private collection, printed and discussed in Breymayer 2011, p. 132.

³⁹⁷ See Gronert 2009 for a comprehensive study of the Düsseldorf Schule in photography.

³⁹⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹⁹ Stefan Gronert calls 'Structurizing of the image space by means of geometrical elements' a leading motif of the work of Gursky. This is to be seen in, for example, the photographs *Schiphol* (1994) and *99 Cent* (1999). Gronert 2009, p. 57, images Gursky on pp. 120-123.

⁴⁰⁰ Jeff Walls himself comments on this in Walls 1995.

⁴⁰¹ Gierstberg et al. 1992; Lehan (ed.) 2006; Melis 2012; Paul and Sullivan 2012 in which photographs by De Ruijter were included and discussed on pp. 30-35.

photographic projects on the ecology of the environment.⁴⁰²

A comparison with the photograph *Rhine II*, by Gursky, reveals much about a photographic intervention, which is also at stake in De Ruijter's *Baumschule #2*. (Fig. 3.14) In fact, *Rhine II* is a special case. It is a photograph of monumental size – typical for the work of Gursky – at 1.5 metres high by three metres wide.⁴⁰³



Fig. 3.14 Andreas Gursky, *Rhine II*, 1999, chromogenic print on paper, 156.4 x 357.5 cm, coll Tate Modern London, inv. No. P78372

The intervention Gursky applies consists of the following aspects: He takes a patch of bank of the River Rhein. The Rhein is an epic river in German landscape and culture, with a long tradition of hymning in song, poetry, literature and the visual arts.⁴⁰⁴ Gursky chose a piece of the river where the landscape shows the modern phenomena of controlling and forcing nature into inflexible, inorganic borders of hard materials. The river is not flowing or meandering freely, but squeezed by human hands into a rigid and straight canal. The boring, bold, geometrical shapes of this landscape are emphasised by Gursky's digital manipulation: he has digitally eliminated 'irregularities' like buildings in the background.⁴⁰⁵ By repetition of the straight shapes of the landscape, he achieves what appear to be perfectly straight and parallel stripes. He exaggerates and further systemises the geometry in landscape, thus making it look epic, monumental, heroic – delirious in its extreme rigidity – like a monumental artwork of geometric painterly abstraction.

A fascinating coincidence lies in the fact that *Baumschule #2* was photographed by De Ruijter

⁴⁰² See for the activist component of landscape photography in Ecotopia the section 'Environmentalism and Art' in Lehan (ed.) 2006, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁰³ In 1999, a copy of this monumental photowork was sold for more than 4.3 million dollars on Christie's art auction in New York as the most expensive photograph at that moment in the world Maev Kennedy, 'Andreas Gursky's Rhine II photograph sells for \$4.3m', *The Guardian*, 11 November 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/nov/11/andreas-gursky-rhine-ii-photograph?CMP=share_btn_link (accessed on 20 March 2017).

⁴⁰⁴ See the archaic medieval German *Nibelungenlied* from the thirteenth century.

⁴⁰⁵ Syring 1998, p. 6 and 53.

on the banks of the Lower Rhine. Gursky made his *Rhein II* photograph around 175 km upstream, in the neighbourhood of Düsseldorf.⁴⁰⁶ *Baumschule #2* and *Rhein II* share an interest in two developments: on the one hand, the industrialisation of the modern, western and man-controlled and systemised landscape, and modernist trends towards geometric abstraction in twentieth-century art and photography on the other hand. The photographs by Gursky and De Ruijter form links between these two developments.⁴⁰⁷ However, even if De Ruijter shares a rigid geometricising with this modernist movement, similar to that employed by Gursky in *Rhein II*, the big difference in De Ruijter's intervention is that he has totally changed the perception of the landscape by applying aerial photography.

By using a vertical view from above, De Ruijter connects to the vertical view downward, i.e. the view of the person in control, which has been increasingly seen in media culture in recent years. Hito Steyerl reflects on this turn from a linear perspective towards a vertical one in her article 'In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective'.⁴⁰⁸ She associates this disappearance of the horizon with what she calls 'The Politics of Verticality':

The view from above is a perfect metonymy for a more general verticalization of class relations in the context of an intensified class war from above – seen through the lenses and on the screens of military, entertainment and information industries.⁴⁰⁹

The work by De Ruijter lacks a political overtone or mission. Instead, the photographer emphasises a certain playfulness in his working with gear belonging to more playful and innocent leisure activities, like kites and fishing rods.⁴¹⁰ However, because of the visual analogies in his work, he cannot prevent the viewer from associating his work with the current trend for aerial views of control like maps, drone and satellite pictures. At least, De Ruijter's work shares their evaluative intent, making his work a reflection on the phenomenon of intensely industrialised and highly systemized agriculture in the Dutch landscape. The work does not evoke political questions on issues of power, but merely invites reflection on the character of man's interaction with nature. Humans do regulate and control nature and, in De Ruijter's work, this becomes a charming interplay. On the one hand, nature is restricted and systematised; on the other hand, nature breaks free of man's limitations and grids with organically shaped outgrowths. Yes, man rules nature, but there is also tenderness in this control; a tenderness alluded to in the poetic title *Baumschule*.

De Ruijter shows the strength of the opining choice for viewpoint and framing. His intervention, to turn the perspective vertically downwards and to choose the different landscape element of a tree nursery that lies on the periphery of the often hilly slopes and city of Rheden, results in a break with the formal conventions of depicting place, with the existing geographical imagination, as I have

⁴⁰⁶ Information on *Rhein II* of the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, who holds one of the edition of six versions of *Rhein II*. <https://www.pinakothek.de/kunst/andreas-gursky/rhein-ii>, accessed on 17 March 2017.

⁴⁰⁷ This was also the context in which photographs by De Ruijter were included in the photography exhibition and festival *distURBANces* in several venues in Luxembourg City in 2013. Ecker (ed.) 2012. (The photographs by De Ruijter were exhibited in the Musée de l'Art et de l'Histoire in Luxembourg in the framework of the *distURBANces* event from 25 April through 1 September 2013, although not printed in the catalogue.)

⁴⁰⁸ Steyerl 2011.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

⁴¹⁰ Conversation with the photographer on 31 May 2017.

signalled through the geospecific comparison in 3.2. De Ruijter uses these interventions, which cause what Wells calls problematization, to make place.

The aim of this methodic step of geogeneric comparison has been to determine which other landscape types *Baumschule #2* connects with. Here, the theory of understanding a landscape photograph in the way cultural geographers and landscape architects understand a landscape in terms of a garden, is helpful. To understand the ideology that is implicit in a landscape, a landscape can be seen as a garden, in which the physical land is processed and moulded into such a shape, the characteristic elements and features of which together refer to a body of thought – much as a microcosmos with meaningful characteristics evokes a macrocosmos of a certain kind. Seeing the landscape photograph by De Ruijter as a garden helps us to think about which elements and features De Ruijter *excluded* from his image, what meaningful landscape characteristics he *included* in the area within the frame, and what features and proportions he combined in order to shape these characteristics in his frame. According to writers on gardens such as Steenberg and Reh, this excluding, including and composing achieves an association with an ideology or body of ideas.

Which reverie of another type of landscape *does* the photograph evoke? The way De Ruijter's *Baumschule #2* makes place lies in the fact that the image shows us shapes and patterns that are impossible to see from the usual eye-level viewpoint. He reveals shapes of the landscape to the viewer that make the photographed land reminiscent of a painterly tradition. However, as shown in 3.2, this painterly tradition is not the painterly tradition of panoramic views of rolling hills of the Golden Ages that one might expect of the area of Rhenen and Kesteren. Nor does *Baumschule #2* connect to the landscape types of the traditional riverscapes like those of Salomon van Ruysdael or the woods with snow, which I compared at the beginning of this section on geogeneric comparison. Through his photographic intervention, De Ruijter's landscape appropriates the characteristics of a totally different painterly tradition: geometrical abstract painting, like that of Dutch painter Piet Mondriaan (1872-1944). This is what causes the problematisation of the conventional image of the place and the way the image makes place.

With his perspective and framing, De Ruijter emphasises geometric systemisation in the landscape. This systemisation of the rectangular fields is easy to associate with paintings like *Tableau I* by Mondriaan. (Fig. 3.15)

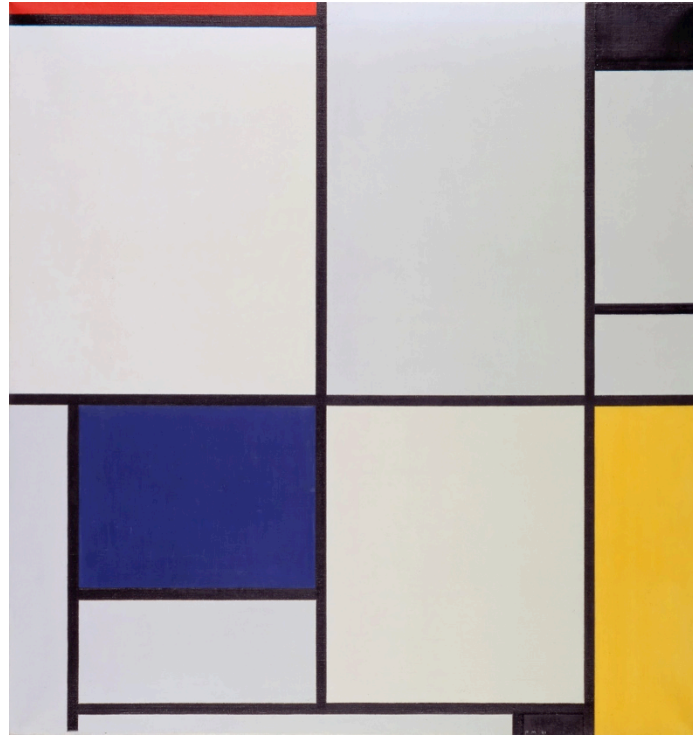


Fig. 3.15 Piet Mondriaan, *Tableau I*, 1921
oil on canvas, 103 x 100 cm,
coll. Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, inv. no. 333329.

In the Netherlands, it is popular to compare the Dutch landscape with geometrical abstract paintings by Mondriaan. Actually it is often said that the abstract paintings by Mondriaan sprout from the same Dutch mind that also systemises the Dutch landscape and nature. In 2015, art critic Sandra Smalenburg expressed this thought with a quote from landscape artist Paul de Kort (b. 1961). De Kort was invited to make a land artwork of the young landscape of the Dutch polder Flevoland, a new province and land created from the IJsselmeer in the 1980s. Talking of this project, the artist said: 'When I sat in my car to the intended location, driving over the straight roads of Flevoland, suddenly Mondriaan came to my mind.'⁴¹¹ A simple, cropped aerial photograph from Google Maps of the Flevoland polder, where Paul de Kort may have been driving, shows why it is not strange that Mondriaan's painting came into the artists' mind. (Fig. 3.16)

⁴¹¹ Smalenburg 2015, p. 189.



Fig. 3.16 Section of the Flevoland polder, cut from Google Maps by the author, maps.google.com, accessed on 9 March 2017.

The physical landscape De Kort had been driving through, which is rigidly structured to work the land as efficiently as possible, is analogous to the pattern of rectangles and straight lines in Mondriaan's abstract painting.

The comparison between the Dutch landscape and Mondriaan's paintings is appropriate and not merely formal. Mondriaan was interested in essential, abstract forms, lines and proportions that underlie nature. Mondriaan's early landscape paintings, in the collection of Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, clearly show this search for more generic shapes and structures than the exact visual ones. (Figs. 3.17 and 3.18)



Figs. 3.17, 3.18

left: Piet Mondriaan, *Evening; Red Tree (Avond; Rode Boom)*, 1908-1910, oil on canvas, 70 x 99 cm, coll. Gemeentemuseum Den Haag

right: Piet Mondriaan, *Grey Tree*, 1911, oil on canvas, 79,7 x 109,1 cm, coll. Gemeentemuseum Den Haag
two paintings from the series of trees in which the artist moved from figurative landscape painting into abstraction.

With his step in 1917 to Neo-plasticism, Mondriaan revealed or created a universe in itself, in which he concentrated on essential forms of life and the world.⁴¹² The shapes and grids of the totally abstract world viewed by Mondriaan in his paintings of Neo-Plasticism, show the same geometrical order that the Dutch impose on their landscape and that De Ruijter reveals by his vertical view and way of framing. Through this way of working, De Ruijter indicates the analogy between the abstraction in the painted nature of Mondriaan and the abstraction in the Dutch physical landscape. More generally speaking, through his intervention, he approaches the vision of the physical landscape represented by geometrical abstract painting, revealing a mental intervention in our environment. This is confirmed by the fact that De Ruijter's later series *Almost Nature* (2012-2014), even more clearly shows photographs that are analogous to compositions like Piet Mondriaan's.⁴¹³ (Fig. 3.19)

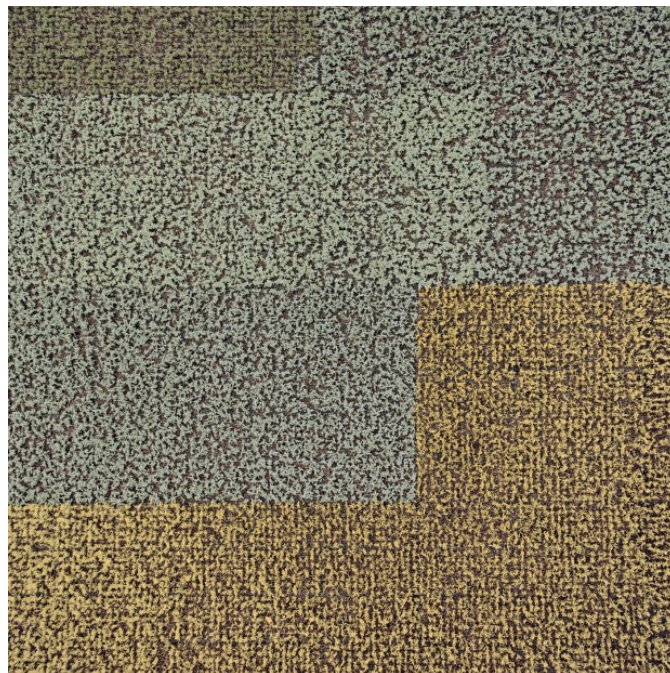


Fig. 3.19 Gerco de Ruijter, untitled #06, from the series *Almost Nature*, Boskoop, 2012-2014 chromogenic print on dibond, 30.5 x 30.5 cm, edition of 5

What does De Ruijter bring about with this association of the Betuwe land near Rhenen with the geometrical nature of Mondriaan? In the section on methodology from cultural geography in Chapter 1, I dealt with writings by Steenbergen and Reh, who, in *Architecture and Landscape*, pointed at the habits of the Romans, to tame wilderness and make place – in their terms, to create *locus* out of *topos* – by drawing the initial cross of the templum and organizing their domestic environment geometrically around it.⁴¹⁴ In 'The geometry of landscape: practical and speculative arts in sixteenth-century Venetian land

⁴¹² Mondriaan introduced this new view of Neo-plasticism first in Dutch language, using the Dutch term 'nieuwe beelding' in *De Stijl* magazine in 1917; in 1921 in a French leaflet, he introduced the term *Le Neo-plasticism* for an international audience.

⁴¹³ See the book *Almost Nature* (2015) by De Ruijter.

⁴¹⁴ Steenbergen and Reh 1988, p. 12.

territories' in the book *The Iconography of Landscape*, Denis Cosgrove further reflects on geometry in the physical landscape.⁴¹⁵ Referring to treatises on geometry in landscape art, for example in *Osservazioni nella pittura* (1580) by cartographer Cristoforo Sorte, and the theory on the 'geometria speculativa' of Francesco Feliciano, he elaborates how, in Renaissance Italy, humans processed the landscape by subjecting it to geometrical patterns and grids.⁴¹⁶ This was paralleled in the achievements of painting, in which the representation of the physical environment was also subjected to the geometry of linear perspective.⁴¹⁷ In Dutch literature, Ton Lemaire explains that the representation of landscape since late Middle Ages has reflected the changing world view.⁴¹⁸ It is this reflection on geometry in landscape that De Ruijter evokes through his connection of the Betuwe location with geometric abstraction.

The theory of Cosgrove and Daniels on landscape representation helps us understand that this intervention by De Ruijter and the resulting geometrical abstract photographs make us aware of an association other than seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painting: geometry in landscape. Cosgrove's theory in *Iconography of Landscape* makes clear that this geometry in landscape is not only a phenomenon that substitutes economic efficiency, or, as Huizinga alludes to, merely an enjoyment of external appearance. As Cosgrove pointed out, we can also understand it as a religious or spiritual dimension.⁴¹⁹ Cosgrove explains this by alluding to the exploitation of land of the Veneto in Renaissance Italy. Religious understanding of the world through Catholicism is replaced by economic exploitation of landscape through geometry. Geometry is considered as a new spiritual body of thought through which landscape came to be understood.

This vision, in which geometry is understood as the new spiritual dimension through which to understand nature, is supported by the fact that the paintings by Piet Mondriaan, which De Ruijter's photograph resembles, also has this spiritual dimension, consisting of geometrical shapes and elementary colours. This depicting of geometry was not merely for visual pleasure. His concern was to experiment with proportions, thus visually representing a mental universe in an artistic practice he called Neo-plasticism.⁴²⁰ Geometry in the physical environment, as explained by Cosgrove, resembles the geometry in an artistically represented universe, which was also the concern of Mondriaan. De Ruijter, through his intervention of aerial photography and cropping, reminds us of this connection.

⁴¹⁵ Denis Cosgrove in: Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, pp. 254-276.

⁴¹⁶ The cited works are Cristoforo Sorte, *Osservazioni nella pittura*, 1580 and Francesco Feliciano, *Scala grimaldella: Libro d'aritmetica, e geometria speculativa e practice* of 1518. Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, pp. 260-262.

⁴¹⁷ Denis Cosgrove points out how it was Sorte in *Osservazione nella pittura* who most clearly emphasized the relationship between geometry in cartography and geometry in linear perspective in landscape painting. Denis Cosgrove in Cosgrove/Daniels 1988, pp. 260-261.

⁴¹⁸ Lemaire 2010 [1970].

⁴¹⁹ Denis Cosgrove, 'The geometry of landscape: practical and speculative arts in sixteenth-century Venetian land territories', in: Cosgrove/Daniels 1988, pp. 254-276.

⁴²⁰ See for an extensive discussion of the work by Piet Mondriaan and neoplasticism, Jaffé 1994 [1980].