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

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English summary

Landscapes have special meanings to people. In the visual communication of these landscape meanings, photography plays an important role. Like other cultural expressions, photographs render meaning to places and 'sense of place' to locations. To speak with Yi-Fu Tuan, they turn abstract 'space' into more definite 'place'. In their theoretical publications, Liz Wells and Helen Westgeest have expounded on the way photographs 'make place'. In her dissertation, Van den Heuvel introduces and first applies her method for the analysis and interpretation of still landscape pictures. Thus, she builds further on the theory of Wells and Westgeest and analyses the way photographs create meaning of place. The research of Van den Heuvel is interdisciplinary between art history, cultural geography and landscape architecture. It is evolved and supervised from art history, but has georeferencing of landscape images as its key intervention, what is borrowed from cultural geography. Landscape architecture provided the four-layer system, developed by Clemens Steenbergen and Wouter Reh at Delft University of Technology, to better discern landscape dimensions in photographs. Through this, the landscape photograph is not only related to other landscape art, as is common in art history, but also to the physical characteristics of the pictured place and to the conventional imagery and the existing collective visual memory of it.

The methodology, newly developed and named 'Van den Heuvel method' or the analysis and interpretation of landscape photographs in this dissertation, exists of three steps. (1) The first step is the *georeferencing* of landscape pictures. A landscape photograph is geotagged to its geographical location on the map, after which the local geological conditions and material characteristics are studied, being the material the photographer works with on location. (2) The second step in the Van den Heuvel method is *geospecific comparison*: the landscape image is compared to landscape pictures of the same place. The goal of this geospecific comparison is to determine, how the landscape image relates to the collective visual memory of exactly that place. Does it affirm the conventional geographical imagination of the place or does it transform it into something else? (3) Finally, the third step is *geogeneric comparison*. In this step, the landscape picture is compared to pictures of different places, which however are of the same landscape *type*.

The agency of the photographer towards the physical landscape determines to what landscape type the photographer makes this place look like. In other words, to what landscape type the photographer assimilates the place. The landscape types, the photographer has a place look like through these interventions are often known from historical landscape painting. Historical landscape painting still provides stereotypical dominant landscape imagery, photographers unavoidably relate to. To achieve this assimilation, the photographer has an amount of photographic interventions at his or her disposal. Van den Heuvel discerns and names the choices for camera position, perspective, framing and timing. With these, the photographer determines which characteristic landscape elements he/she rhetorically includes, excludes and combines, to show these in a certain relation to each other. Timing is further subdivided by Van den Heuvel in time of the year (season), day in the week, hour of the day, type of weather condition (decisive for light and the occurrence of snow in the landscape, for example)

and ordonnance. The latter amounts to waiting, until moving elements in the scene, like clouds, animals, passers-by and vehicles have reached positions most desired by the photographer.

Van den Heuvel first applies her method to three case studies in the Dutch landscape: the Haarlemmermeer area around Schiphol Airport near Amsterdam as photographed by Theo Baart and published in the photobook *Werklust. Biography of a Landscape in Transition* (2015); a tree nursery in the banks of the Lower Rhine as photographed by Gerco de Ruijter for the monumental photographic print *Baumschule #2* (2009) and the nature reserve of a heath area near Laren in the Gooi-area in the Central Netherlands as photographed by Kim Boske for the monumental photograph *Mapping 5* (2008-2009).

Werklust by Theo Baart deals with the Haarlemmermeer polder, southwest of Amsterdam: the area where the national Amsterdam Airport Schiphol is situated. *Werklust* is a long-term autobiographical photography project, carried out by this photographer who grew up in the main town of this area: Hoofddorp. The landscape of the Haarlemmermeer is relatively young: only in the nineteenth century, when the lake through drainage was turned into land. The initial agricultural function of the polder, is now being overrun by a function of the area that dates from way back: infrastructural knot between the big cities and sea harbours and agriculture (floriculture) in the west and the trading areas in the inland parts in the east. This function is now being reinforced by the fast-growing airport of Schiphol, what globalizes and intensifies the formerly local trade at high speed. Geospecific comparison shows that this vernacular, infrastructural landscape has had little geographical imagination. Geogeneric comparison learns that Baart's *Werklust* is a centrifugally (from the first-person narrator) directed exploring group of photographs. Their intent and narrative structure are comparable with sketches in sketchbooks, that the historical landscape painters like Jan van Goyen made as preparation to their landscape paintings. The photobook, however, is no preparatory study but a final state, that in a definite form offers a combination of facets, collectively forming a total whole image in the beholder's mind. Like the New Topographics pictured vernacular landscape in the United States for the first time and Bernd and Hilla Becher industrial landscapes, Baart as well forms a comprehensive image of the Haarlemmermeer for the first time, which enables the consideration of its landscape image.

The photograph *Baumschule #2* by Gerco de Ruijter is an areal photo, made with a camera on a kite, of a tree nursery between Kesteren and Rhenen. Georeferencing and study of the physical circumstances shows why the banks of the Lower Rhine, where this picture was taken, were so attractive to both the seventeenth-century painters, as well as to De Ruijter now. The area regards a river that is approaching its estuary in the sea. Age-long accumulation of sediments caused that hills, so rare for the flat Netherlands, came into existence here. Moreover, the river clay soil turned out to be ideal for tree and fruit growing, for which the area has been famous for centuries. The geospecific comparison shows that this so-called Betuwe area already back in the seventeenth century attracted famous painters from the western parts of the Netherlands, like Aelbert Cuyp, Jan van Goyen and Salomon van Ruysdael, who came here especially for the hilly aspect of the river landscape, which enhanced its pictorial character. De Ruijter juxtaposes another image opposed to this conventional image and instead directing the attention to the industrial and systemized character of the horticulture. By radically toppling over the perspective vertically down, he focuses on the geometrical patterns in

which the trees are planted. Combined with the way of framing, this makes his photographs assimilate with abstract paintings like those by Piet Mondriaan. It is the picturing of geometry in landscape, which according to cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove is the new spiritual dimension in landscape that comes with economic exploitation.

Whereas Baart constructed a new image and De Ruijter transformed a conventional image, the photowork *Mapping 5* by Kim Boske is more affirmative: it builds further on a historical image tradition. The photograph pictures the Zuiderheide near the town of Laren in the Gooi area in the Central Netherlands: a nature reserve where Boske used to go for strolls with her parents while she was a child. Georeferencing and study of the local physical conditions show that this area was shaped millennia ago by old European rivers that by now have changed their course. The fluvial deposits caused the peculiar creamy white, gray and yellow ochre colors, visible in the photograph of Boske. These colors as well typify landscape paintings by the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Laren School of painting, that is brought about by the geospecific comparison. The sober life of farmers and shepherds in the heath area suited an artistic ideal, judging as well the painting of Barbizon and Vincent van Gogh. The construction in 1882 of the Gooi Steam Tram stimulated the visit by artists from The Hague and Amsterdam, who came to paint the heath area and the life of its inhabitants frequently. Partly due to the popular art of the Laren school of painters, which is still being admired a lot in the nearby Singer Museum in Laren, the heath was made into a landscape reserve. The photograph by Boske shows several sides of a tree on this heath simultaneously, which she photographed while walking around it and merged into one image with Photoshop in her computer. The blurriness caused by this simultaneity reminds of painting. Together with the similarities in colors, composition and size, the resemblance of this photograph by Boske to the painting of the Laren school becomes striking. The continuity in landscape image is mutually affirmed by the Laren School of painting, the turning the heath area near Laren into a nature reserve and the similarities between the size, colors and composition in the photo of Boske.

After the methodology for analysing landscape pictures is expounded and clarified through the application on three examples, the dissertation closes with emphasizing that landscape photography can be considered as one of the cultural expressions, cultural geography focuses on, to recover the meaning of landscape to people. The photographic interventions and choices of the photographer for picturing the landscape, can be seen as the human activities, writers as Hayden Lorimer, Tim Creswell and Stephen Daniels (especially in his later writings) write about from the 'more-than-representational' approach to landscape. These activities determine what landscape means to people.