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The bureau of operational landscapes

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BUREAU MISSION ONE:

[01]

MIS

#01

BUREAU-CRATIC VISION

MIS

#01

23 Medium fries, with ketchup, and a Coke Zero — in a can.

INTRODUCTION

The Port of Rotterdam is not where, or what, you think it is. The heart of its operations, Maasvlakte, lies an approximate forty-five-kilometre drive west of the city centre, surpassing not just the urban, then suburban, then ex-urban hinterland, but land as we might conventionally understand it. The Port's formation is entirely artificial, a new construct that transcends geography but mirrors centuries of Dutch hydrological and engineering omnipotence. It is not quite hidden, nor is it totally visible, either. Maasvlakte squats like a fat tongue sticking out from the mouth of what was once a natural delta of the Maas River but is now a series of interlinked, manufactured canals emptying into the North Sea. Maasvlakte is the site of research – while I may at times refer to the Port, or the Port of Rotterdam, or its administrative arm the Port Authority, it is this specific territory where all excursions and inquiry mentioned hereafter are situated.

To get you acquainted with Maasvlakte, the best place to start is The Smickel Inn, which is not an inn, but a snack bar run by two jolly middle-aged men who never fail to remember my name, nor my order.[23] It's otherwise known as the "Balcony of Europe," which in some regard is true. The Inn sits right at the entrance of Maasgeul, a 14-kilometre-long channel scraped out of the seabed of the North Sea, a liquid red carpet for the ships coming and going to the Port of Rotterdam. Cruise ships, oil tankers, pilot boats, container ships, car ferries, dredgers, supply ships, bulk carriers, ro-ros, and service ships come and go along this channel all day, all night, all year. It's the final approach or first moment in a journey any ship endures. The Smickel Inn stands watch, an unofficial overlook that faces the sea, turning its back on the container terminals not even a few hundred meters behind. Situated on a nearly kilometre-long stretch of gravel, the Inn plays host to families out for a day trip, camper vans making a pitstop, shipspotters and other strangers, all there to gaze out to the sea. Sailors or workers from the Port seldom visit. The Inn is the only civilian redoubt on all of Maasvlakte. Its closest competitor is the Shell gas station located 21 kilometres away in Oostvoorne, an 18-minute drive if you're thirsty. It is quite literally the end of the road — drive any further and you will have to pass through the gates of the Maasvlakte Oil Terminal, not a place for civilians. The Balcony of Europe sits at the northern end of Maasvlakteweg, the main thoroughfare that inscribes the outer perimeter of the Port. It takes the shape of a slightly deformed capital letter C, darting outwards in a westerly direction into the North Sea, before finally curving down and tucking back into the shore to form its base at the southern end. This band of tarmac, continuously laden with transport trucks, demarcates the periphery of the Port, imprinting a clean division between public and official. Nestled within the bosom of the periphery are the major shipping terminals, train lines, roadways, and other infrastructures. The public is relegated to this thin outer strip, accompanied by a couple dozen or so windmills circumnavigating the Port's furthest edges like a kind of necklace.

Before proceeding further, I want to take you for a “drive” along this peripheral edge, as this liminal strip is where my research lay, and it is the zone of public access designated by the Port of Rotterdam Authority. First, we “drive” from north to south, then make a return trip following the same route back north to our origin point. We do this because there are two views, and each one has relevance for this research. On one side, a recreational strip facing the North Sea hemmed in by a massive artificial dune. On the other side, its counter-image: the 24/7 heart of port operations. Driving is the only logical way to get around Maasvlakte, even though there is a network of bicycle paths which seem to be infrequently used by Polish and Bulgarian truck drivers taking a break. Departing from The Smickel Inn and looking to your right (starboard, to use nautical terms), a huge, artificial grass-tufted dune rises up. About three stories tall, possibly even higher at points, it is impossible to view the North Sea beyond this dune unless you scramble up to its top. When a container ship passes, you can barely see the colourful array of containers peeking over. Other ships are rarely big enough to breech the dune’s height. This wall of sand and grass continues for the entire journey, all the way past the Slufter, a depot for contaminated silt removed by the continuous dredging operations the Port must always undergo. Eventually, the dune-wall slinks down to the Hartelkanal, at which point it descends and transforms into a so-called “safety contour” protecting the offices of oil and gas company BP from a potentially calamitous explosion from the neighbouring refinery. Here you’ve reached Maasvlakte’s southern end. Head east for another thirty kilometres, and you will eventually reach Rotterdam’s centre.

Now, we turn around and reverse direction, south to north. The first “drive” was the public view, out across the sea; next, we gaze towards the official view — the view with which I am most concerned — littered with the sinews of petrochemical refineries and storage tanks, with bulk iron ore and coal handling facilities puncturing the ground and creating the first scratchings of an industrial horizon, unfolding kilometre after kilometre. What locals colloquially refer to as the “fossil port” — because of Rotterdam’s prominence as one of the largest hubs of petroleum, oil, and other fossil fuel products — eventually cedes in favour of the mass of shipping terminals. Coloured gantry cranes mark your arrival to the Port’s primary business: the dark blue and orange of ECT Euromax, the light grey of Rotterdam World Gateway, the powder blue of APM. Still driving, an industrial leviathan unfolds continuously, secreting an integrated network of terminals, roads, and railways united in systems of algorithmic tracking and management. Over there, across the distance, is land organized by flows and processes, indexing the landscape into an image of logistics. Finally, having returned to the northern end, the journey is over. We stop for a snack from The Smickel Inn. There’s nowhere left to traverse.

24 Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2011), 6.

25 Wells, *Land Matters*.

SETTING THE STAGE

What I have just shared is an official landscape created through, and by, logistical processes. I came to learn that this landscape is not like any other. Initially, I was stymied every time I would photograph in the Port, realizing that the legacies and conventions of landscape photography were inadequate to address the complexities imposed by the particular demands of logistics. Its morphology and propensity for representational breakdown proved elusive, forcing me to reconsider how — and what — a landscape photograph could be, but this confusion also revealed how the Port is a melange of power, surveillance, and architectural form shaping (public) perception. This is Bureau Mission One's focus. My aim here is to disclose the logistical landscape as an obfuscating agent against its own depiction by discussing the ways in which it creates an image — or perception — of power and control that is outwardly projected to an unsuspecting public.

At first, landscape photography proved seemingly frustrating, yet because of this act — perhaps even in spite of it — I discovered a form of visual "management" that is both omnipresent and inchoate, a kind of pre-determined and fixed vision that strategically distances and disconnects the logistical landscape from the everyday, ordinary experience while simultaneously operating as vital due to its critical role in global circulation. I term this "bureaucratic vision." But before I dig thoroughly into this concept, I first introduce how the traditions of landscape photography reflect and reinforce contemporary (and historical) attitudes through specific conventions, such as visual frameworks, tropes, and ideologies. These conventions represent land as an organized, consumable, and controlled space. As British photography scholar Liz Wells notes, photographs are codified systems of seeing, that "operate through codes and conventionalized meanings and practices. Conventions are not entirely arbitrary."[24]

In my view, the conventions of landscape photography can be distilled into sub-categories, each with their own discrete legacies yet coalesce to form a broader suite of traditions. First, the centuries-long antecedent of painting has profound influence on landscape photography, of which we are still absorbed in today. Specifically, medieval techniques like linear perspective as developed by Leon Alberti (1404-72) and the Renaissance's elevation of the Golden Ratio established the representation of space as ordered and harmonious, with human experience at the centre. Next, there are conceptual categories of landscape representation introduced in the 18th and 19th centuries such as the sublime, the picturesque, the romantic, and the pastoral.[25] Each have their own political, social, national, and cultural histories and unique legacies, yet still exert influence today. Third, out of the development of perspective is the notion of control, where order and clarity are centralized around a single vantage point, creating a proprietorial gaze over the land that transforms wilderness — or 'out of order' nature — into manageable, framed entities: holding specific resonance for Bureau Mission One that

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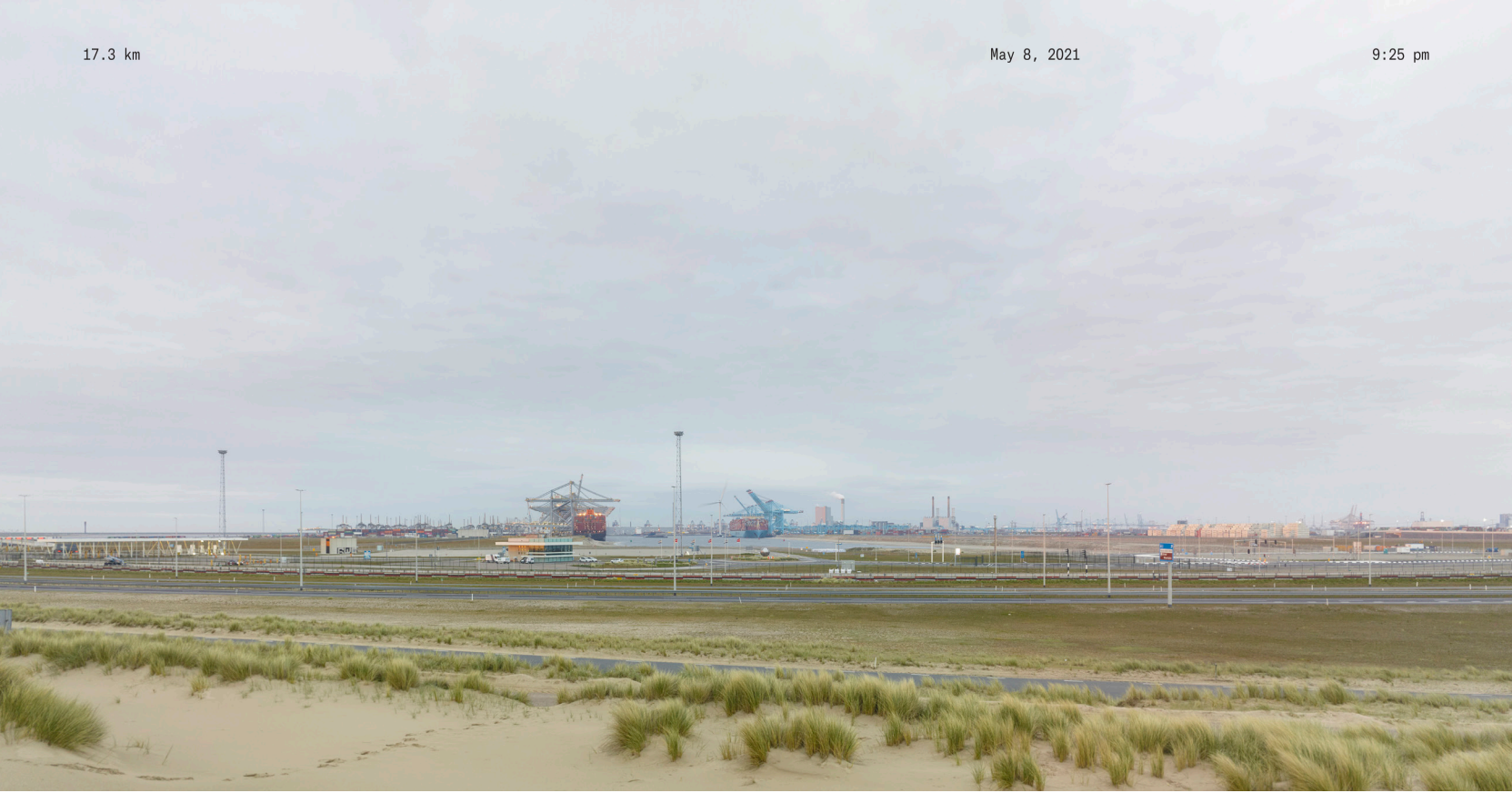

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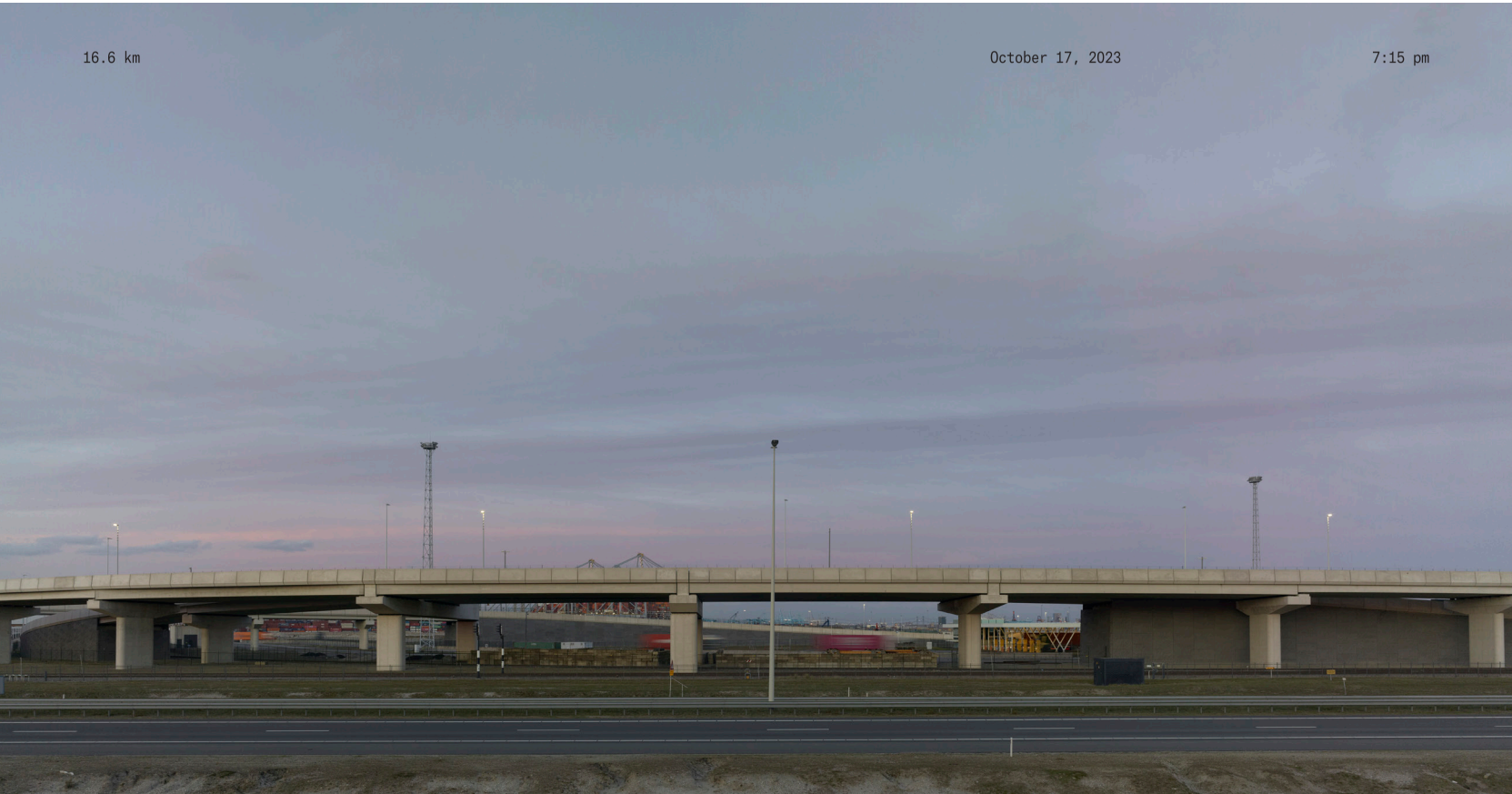

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explores the traits of visual order and control through "bureaucratic vision." Lastly, there are formal and compositional conventions that comprises and establishes the landscape photograph. I recognize formal conventions cannot be considered splintered from the others, yet for clarity sake I address them here as a distinct category.

In the following two examples you can see how conventions of landscape painting have influenced photography [Figs.2, 3]. First, a painting by Thomas Cole, an artist associated with the Hudson River School in the United States, a group of 19th century painters known for European painterly techniques yet responding to the grand scale and characteristics of the American landscape.[26] Cole's painting is indicative of the sublime, where awe, danger, and wonder plays on the emotions that transcend human control, with a faintly aura of moral or ideological concern. In the second picture, by the American photographer Ansel Adams, a similar vertiginous view is on display, echoing Cole's painting that reinforces a sublime ideology of unspoilt wilderness. Both are "preoccupied with the allegorical and the spiritual."[27] But it is not just in the convention of the sublime these two pictures present. To me, their conceptual and compositional or formal lineage is clear. Both deploy Nature to reinforce national identity, aligning, in this example, an image to Manifest Destiny, presenting the land as a scene to be observed and admired, but also organized and implicitly owned.[28] Partly this is conducted through perspective and framing, a mathematical application of single point perspective introduced by the medieval draughtsman Alberti and later refined with the Golden Ratio of the Renaissance (that is, the division of the frame into thirds, with the horizon usually slicing the bottom third horizontally from the top two-thirds).[29] These techniques conspire to organize space, creating, in my view, an almost possessive gaze over nature. "The affirmation of this model," British photography scholar David Bate writes, "was that the spectator is firmly a cultural figure, observing the land and its occupants as the object of its contemplation from afar."[30] That is, the elevated and detached perspective adopted by Cole and Adams signal the land as something external to the scene and evacuated of its social referent, where Man himself is centred as spectator of a scene and organized around a single point of view.[31] There are, of course, other considerations, such as the use of light and atmosphere which Cole and Adams expertly wielded to heighten drama and mood. Historically, landscape photographers used light in different ways. A pastoral photograph might soften the shadows, while a sublime photograph, such as Adams's, manipulates contrast to draw out the transcendence of the Teton mountains.[32]

This is just a cursory overview of various factors that collaborate to create what I deem a conventional landscape photograph. What unites these conventions — with a recognition that it is impossible to collapse hundreds of years of art history into a single, unified theory — is how they merge to produce a form of spectacle, producing landscape imagery (paintings, photographs) that is simultaneously "uncritical and conservative."[33] This last note is vital. That is, I follow the Italian photography curator Marta Dahó, who argues that landscape photography's roots in painterly traditions and conventions is mostly incompatible with the contemporary spatial moment.[34]

26 Wells, *Land Matters*, 66.

27 Wells, *Land Matters*, 31.

28 Manifest Destiny was a 19th century American doctrine stating that the United States was destined to expand across North America, becoming a hallmark of the expansionist movement to self-justify the annexation and displacement of indigenous populations. See: Frederick Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

29 Consider how modern digital cameras incorporate this grid as part of their default settings. On my own camera, there are six steps to turning it off.

30 David Bate and Liz Wells, "Editorial," *Photographies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 135.

31 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), cited in Wells, *Land Matters*, 40.

32 Wells, *Land Matters*.

33 Wells, *Land Matters*, 32.

34 Marta Dahó, "Landscape and the Geographical Turn in Photographic Practice," *Photographies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 227-248.

[Fig.2]

[Fig.3]

She calls for practices that deal in the geopolitical to place greater scrutiny on the conventions of landscape (and its inheritances) as a genre. [Fig.4][35] Thus, what underpins this research is the quest to understand if conventional landscape photography protocols can "still provide a valid category of [...] engagement" in a logistical landscape.[36] This argument foreshadows my alliance with cultural geography that from here on serves as an indispensable addition to a contemporary landscape photographic practice, a hybrid notion that is concerned with the expressive as much as the investigative, and as an object and tool of and for research.

35 Fig.4 is a picture of me photographing in Maasvlakte. I include this photo because it is indicative of landscape convention. The tripod, the distant view, even the camera I am using has significant historical precedent (even if it is a contemporary digital camera). It still functions like a canvas on an easel or an old field camera; I do not have a viewfinder but am forced to survey the scene and frame it approximate. I use the LCD monitor much like ground glass on older cameras. And, there is me as the solitary producer of photographs.

36 Olga Smith, "Introduction: Photography and Landscape," *Photographies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 140.

Throughout Bureau Mission One, photographs and text operate in tandem to reveal the paradoxical nature of the logistical landscape, which on the one hand is crucially visible in local and global networks, yet on the other hand remains illegible and ambiguous due to its "official" character, shielding its operations through measures of distance, dispersal, and discretion. This placed me, as a landscape photographer, in a predicament: how could I enter this space with a camera if an image is already established prior to my arrival? What role does photography play in such a landscape that refutes any visual intervention into its official framework?

To find out, I outline the conditions that sculpt the Port of Rotterdam through photography, analyzing the logistical and architectural strategies that form bureaucratic and official visibility (or lack thereof), and its resistance to legibility and access. Bureau Mission One is a hybrid operator, invoking photographs and the written word as equal partners. This section is not just an examination of the physical morphology of the Port, but it is also a critical analysis of the visual and bureaucratic mechanisms that maintain the Port's official status. Throughout Bureau Mission One, two simultaneous actions occur: an attempt to uncover layers of control (physical and symbolic) that conspire to define the Port, and a quest to provoke my chosen medium's capacity for engagement within such a scenario.

Bureau Mission One sets the stage for my research into how landscape photography might transcend the limitations imposed by logistics and attain legibility. By situating the core issues that I encountered in the field, I establish the criteria and urgency for the remainder of this dissertation to reimagine an alternative approach to landscape photography and my own practice — one that can effectively operate within the complex and contradictory condition of a site like Rotterdam's port, by contesting its authoritative narrative to invite a re-evaluation of what it means to not just see, but to also participate in these pivotal, yet obscure, territories.

[Fig.4]

THE PORT OF ROTTERDAM AS A LOGISTICAL LANDSCAPE

Ports, like other official landscapes, are situated in similar zones across the world, all serviced by complex infrastructures that span the instrumental, communicative, spectral, and material. American landscape essayist J.B.

Jackson characterizes such locations as "official landscapes." The official landscape is highly inaccessible, partly defined by economics and access to decision-making power, not just literally, but figuratively, too. This official status dissolves their visibility and legibility, keeping these landscapes hidden amidst power trajectories that occlude them from any external scrutiny.[37] In Chapter 2, I refer more extensively to the official landscape, and seek ways into how such landscapes may be contested via landscape photography. A partner of the official landscape is the logistical landscape — which is primarily concerned with operationalizing the circulation, distribution, and storage of commodities, and include ports, railroads, highways, warehouses, and distribution centres — is not just limited to physical form, but identified by what American architect Keller Easterling deems as "spaces of exemption," an admixture comprising a complex global network of exchange, administrative processes, and other linkages.[38]

Secluded in and by the landscape and disconnected from ordinary experiences, a port — integral to the logistical landscape — presents a contradiction: massively embedded in the everyday due to its crucial role in the facilitation of planetary goods, yet hardly comprehensible or even recognizable.[39] It operates within a degree of visible separation from surrounding environs, with the exception of being plugged into visible infrastructures that grease its operation and production. Ports are more than a central node in the transshipment of teddy bears and car parts; Easterling notes that they sit squarely within a nexus of political conflict, corporate ownership, and security concerns, all driving the need for frictionless exchange.[40] Their very "officialness" is what shields the operations that make the world function. In my view, the byproduct, or symptom, of the logistical landscape is bureaucratic vision, which I define as a predetermined and restrictive perspective crafted by logistical processes that enforces a specific, peripheral visibility while simultaneously evading public comprehension and access.

While a port operates from a specific site — like Maasvlakte's engineered formation created from re-distributed land — they are also dispersed across oceans, lands, and air. This mixture of distance and dispersal is what makes them servants to bureaucratic procedures, shaping the physical container port into what British architectural theorist Reyner Banham termed a "flatscape" already in 1967.[41] For example, ports are entangled in a complex administrative framework of abbreviations and international standards governed by various treaties and regulations. These abbreviations create a matrix of global cooperation, regulation, and enforcement, exemplified by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Maritime Bureau (IMB).[42] The IMB's mandate is to monitor maritime piracy, but it also collaborates with the IMO to standardize other necessary security measures.[43] Easterling notes that physical searches, ID tags and cards, transponders, RFID sensors, biometrics, and other security paraphernalia litter the logistical landscape, gathered behind a chain link fence and networked by surveillance cameras and *Douane* patrols marking the Port's periphery and shaping a portion of the Port's particular morphology.[44] These combined security measures are just one amongst multiple examples of how logistics materially and symbolically dissolves the Port from view.

37 Paul Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, eds. Paul Groth and Todd W. *Bressi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1-21.

38 Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London: Verso, 2016).

39 Neil Brenner and Nikos Katsikis, "Operational Landscapes: Hinterlands of the Capitalocene," *Architectural Design* 90, no. 1 (January 2020): 22-31.

40 Keller Easterling, *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and Its Political Masquerades* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 101.

41 Reyner Banham, "Flatscape with Containers," *New Society* 10, no. 255 (1967): 231-232.

42 "International Maritime Organization," accessed February 21, 2024, https://www.imo.org.

43 "International Maritime Bureau," International Chamber of Commerce, accessed February 21, 2024, https://www.icc-ccs.org/icc/imb.

44 Easterling, *Enduring Innocence*, 109.

Logistical landscapes are outcomes of expertise from the professional class — whom Easterling considers to be engineers and planners, economists, technologists, administrators, IT consultants, and McKinsey experts — who collude to shape the physical and symbolic landscape into an image of bureaucracy and efficiency.[45] Logistical space is a landscape to be seen, not touched — and certainly not to be dwelled upon. Under such bureaucratic collaboration, the view becomes objectified into an image, naturalized as incontestable because it is framed, staged, and controlled. The Port of Rotterdam's material and symbolic conditions are implicated in producing this image. For example, the very visible infrastructures on display are not just machines for the processing of goods, but are also symbols of global trade efficiencies, technological prowess, and economic dependency. Because of the necessary distance needed to operate a deepwater port, the landscape abstracts the human view from its on-the-ground reality, simplifying complex operations and infrastructure into manageable and seemingly organized visuals.

I began to understand the Port landscape as if it was a "dream," an (un) reality of progress and economic development put forward by the Dutch state as if to say: without this landscape, then we, in the Netherlands, will never progress. The issue, as I see it, is that the Port of Rotterdam demanded me to consider it as a spectacular object; how it got that way is of little concern.[46] This, however, is one of landscape's vital conditions, and one which I explain in more detail in Chapters 1 and 2. To briefly foreshadow that argument, though, landscape, and in particular, an official landscape like the Port of Rotterdam, hides the chaotic, dirty, and noisy realities of its operations, flattening out and smoothing over details that might complicate its image as robust, efficient — the Future. The American photographer and writer Allan Sekula spoke of this dirty reality that is cloaked behind the "dream" of economic efficiency in his book *Fish Story*, which I will also introduce in Chapter 2 as a way of associating landscape and photography.

This is the basic essence of bureaucratic vision: you can look upon the site, even admire its spectacle, but your perspective is always excluded from the official view, "policed," as the French philosopher Jacques Rancière would frame it.[47] Briefly, as I introduce Rancière's arguments more extensively in Chapter 5, his notion finds purpose here, where "police" is a symbolic and practical system of rules, norms, and functions, and not necessarily associated with law enforcement. Its counterpart is "politics," by which Rancière means those who are normally excluded from frameworks established by police.[48] Under these conditions, bureaucratic vision can be understood as a visible shape of police. That is, the structures that configure bureaucratic vision are often invisible, a form of "policing" that regulates what is seen and known, effectively shaping public image and the public's collective understanding of the Port's role in the global economy. As such, bureaucratic vision is a dream, severing the official from the everyday, only ever to be gazed upon from afar, partially considered as an imaginary view. The landscape is defined and determined, and all we can do, as outsiders, is gaze upon it.

45 Easterling, *Enduring Innocence*, 118.

46 Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 8.

47 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 83.

48 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*.

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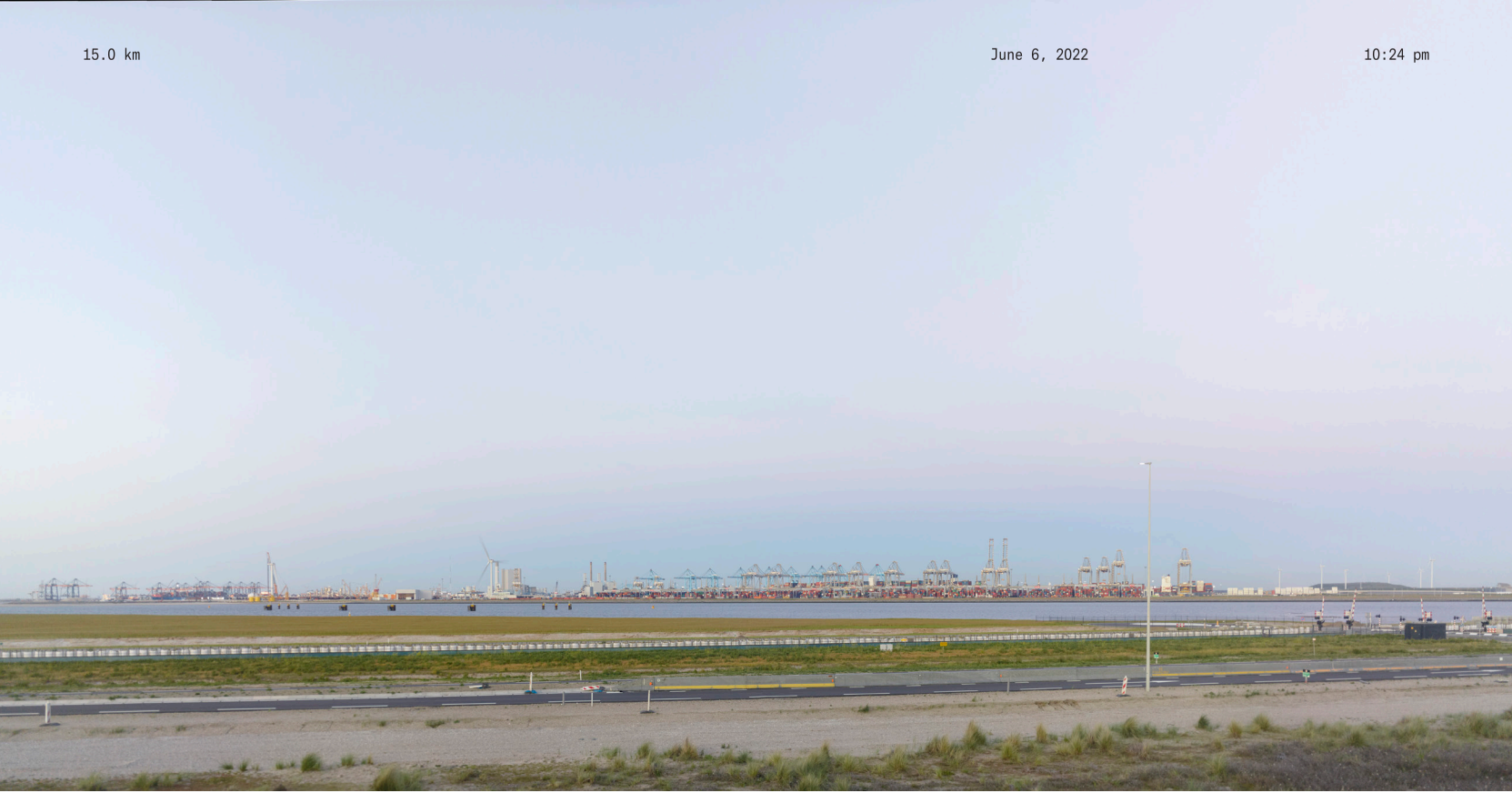

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NOT-SO EMPTY DESERT

For me, the periphery is where legibility can be summoned. Yet, out here, circling the edges of the "flatscape," I am frozen, frequently unable to navigate freely. I give up, or at least my eyes do. What seems to be endless emptiness is periodically marked by giant container ships sitting passively in their berths; I make it a habit to try and spot a sailor on deck, but rarely do. Their soiled work fatigues are camouflaged by the rust and algorithmically aligned shipping containers. Besides, they do not have time for a nod of recognition — turnaround time is quick these days; priority is on the movement of goods, not on tourism. To me, this is a place of radical loneliness: a bureaucratic abyss. They don't call it the Ghost Port for nothing. No matter how close I get, this is still abstract space. Theorist of visual culture W.J.T. Mitchell eloquently conjures this blank heart in his writing about deserts, which he says "is a place of visions, in short, but not of figures, features, or forms. The image presented by this landscape is abstract, anionic, punctuated only by the lone tree, the solitary witness."[49]

A container port is much like a desert, with the exception of the solitary witness. Witness implies a reciprocal relationship, of observing and being observed. The Port resists witnessing; logistics, by its nature, retreats from visual negotiation. Mitchell has a term for pictures that could be produced in such an area: "monotheistic."[51] These are photographs whose referent is "the abstract, invisible god who speaks and writes, but does not show his face, who leaves his catastrophic footprints on the earthquake riven terrain and retreats into the invisible distance. This emptying and abstracting tendency is endemic to the very concept of landscape."[52] Closer to home, Dutch architectural historians Carola Hein and Nancy Couling write about the North Sea and its massive amount of energy infrastructure as a "petroleumscape," home to both temporary and permanent structures of extraction.[53] Yet, "the North Sea and its coastline stand as an example of a saturated space of logistics that is widely viewed by the public as a void."[54]

The danger is to accept the Port as an empty frontier or void, a blank spot ripe for exploitation. Speaking to this, here I provide a short anecdote that I will return to at different points throughout the dissertation. The Port Authority runs an interpretive centre called *FutureLand;* one of its offerings is a tour boat ride that for €12 and 60 minutes travels amidst Maasvlakte's container terminal.[55] On one journey, my tour guide, a retired sea captain, suddenly made us all stop and gaze out the tinted window upon the myriad ships and cranes and automated robots splayed out in the distance: "And *that,"* he bellowed with a grand sweep of his arm, "*used* to be the North Sea!" For the ex-sea captain tour guide, land is dislodged from the peculiarities of place, a mere moment waiting for its transformation into optimized and financialized territory. His point was to prove the ingenuity of the Dutch engineers who conjured something from nothing; I see it as the pursuit of (capital) expansion at the expense of other spaces and their particularities,

49 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 273.

51 Mitchell applies this term to the photographs produced by Timothy O'Sullivan for the U.S. Geological Survey. See: Mitchell, "Holy Landscape," 273.

52 Mitchell, "Holy Landscape," 273.

53 Carola Hein, "Analyzing the Palimpsestic Petroleumscape of Rotterdam," *Global Urban History Blog*, 2016, accessed May 18, 2024, https://globalurbanhistory.com.

54 Carola Hein and Nancy Couling, "Blankness: The Architectural Void of North Sea Energy Logistics," in *The Architecture of Logistics*, eds. Sanaan Bensi and Francesco Marullo, Footprint 12, no. 2 #23 (2018), 88. Geographer Philip Steinberg refers to the cultural evolution of the ocean surface as a "great void." Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

55 Port of Rotterdam, FutureLand Ferry (website), accessed April 28, 2024, https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/to-do-port/futureland/agenda/futureland-ferry.

regardless of if they're "empty" or not. To visualize something as empty equates it with a deficit of life, with no history or value except to be turned into property of the state. As Singaporean global studies scholar Charmaine Chua states, to presuppose the sea as "aqua nullius" reinforces the fallacy that any development or expansion is an act of restoration, or a retrieval, of something that was once yours.[56] Accepting emptiness gives permission to not contest, confront, or accept what's there on the land — or sea — evacuating any traces of its conditions of production. A reminder, then, from Sekula, writing in his eponymous book *Fish Story*, who offers up an evocative statement, a proclamation that the sea and ports are never empty, a zeroless and weightless game not only represented by accountants and autonomous vehicles, but also forming a "crude materialism underwritten by disaster. Ships explode, leak, sink, collide. Accidents happen every day. Gravity is recognized as a force."[57] In other words, accepting bureaucratic vision at face value denies this crude materialism, perceiving what is on display as a canvas for ideological inscription enforced not by those doing the viewing — you — but by official stakeholders who fill the emptiness with their own version.

A PUBLIC PHOTOGRAPH, AN OFFICIAL VIEW

As products of the scientific-professional class, logistical landscapes project a managerial view of unapproachable territory — quite the opposite of common ground. The official view, because of its exclusivity, is a singular vantage that is fixed and naturalized, preventing any attempt of imaginative access by those deemed external to its formation. In 1867, the former American Civil War photographer Timothy O'Sullivan was commissioned by geologist and surveyor Clarence King's government-sponsored *Fortieth Parallel Survey* to reproduce nascent bureaucratic form.[58] O'Sullivan and his cohort created an index of expertise, professional standards, and scientific ingenuity that established the American West as an official landscape.[59] American art historian Joel Snyder writes that O'Sullivan's photographs are like pictorialized "No Trespassing" signs, where the only means of egress into this world is through expertise. O'Sullivan's photographs, in Snyder's words, "mark the beginning of an era — one in which we still live — in which expert skills provide the sole means of access to what was once held to be part of our common inheritance."[60]

I concur with this statement; after years of photographing in the Port, I learned that in any official landscape, power is wielded in precise yet diverse ways. Any photograph that I ever desired to make was always going to be dependent upon access that I could, or could not, manage. While the outer periphery of Maasvlakte offers up some possibilities for a scenic overlook, this view is still limited, reduced by distance into a detached gaze. To overlook, states W.J.T. Mitchell, is an invitation to behold the view, but not to really look at anything in particular. On display is an administratively approved site that implies the total "gestalt," yet points to nothing.[61] Acc-

56 Charmaine Chua, "Containing the Ship of State: Managing Mobility in an Age of Logistics" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, July 2018), 266.

57 Sekula, *Fish Story*, 12.

58 Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 40.

59 Joel Snyder, "Territorial Photography," in *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed., ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 175-201.

60 Snyder, "Territorial Photography," 200.

61 W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), vii-viii.

ess, I learned, is managed and controlled via bureaucratic processes, even in the ostensibly public periphery. The implication is that overlooks make everything available to be consumed in a sweeping gaze, but this is not so in this landscape, because a port can offer no totality if it is the result of the partially visible and totally invisible. An overlook, according to Mitchell, is provisional and proximate. Such is the scenario into which I enter with my camera.

I do not have access to any operations of the Port, nor am I able to negotiate that access unless I accept the Port Authority's official view. I do not. The fallout, I quickly discovered, was that my original decision to stay specifically within publicly-inscribed zones was still susceptible to the official view, regardless of my participation in their regime. Any photograph I made was already appropriated and predetermined by the conditions of logistics. Its representation was set, and I was not privy to its "rental." Normally, I scout the site and seek the best vantage point, taking some photographs along the way to slowly shape and craft a composition that I feel is suitable and that best represents whatever it is I aim to photograph. In the Port, my experiences as a photographer were rendered useless in the unrelenting gaze of bureaucratic vision. The Port's preconditions establishes the frame; my own subjectivity plays a very minor role, relegated to equipment and technical decisions. The photographs in this section are visual outcomes of this non-negotiation. Bureaucratic vision is indifferent to any particular viewer; the official view always triumphs. It transcends the individual and subjectivity, homogenizing any possible representational schema precisely because of this indifference. As a photographer, this of course leaves me in a bind.

And yet, looking at my photographs, I consider them "industrial traces."[62] They function, says American art historian Jacob Emery, as "testaments to the larger economic process in which they participate and of which they are a result."[63] As industrial traces of bureaucratic vision, my photographs in this section testify to the economic processes that they emerge from and actively construct. The photographs are paradoxical; they operate as a passive depiction of reality, yet they are active agents unveiling the economic structures they are traces of. I refer to American author and essayist Susan Sontag, who noted that a trace, in relation to photography, is "a material vestige of its subject," an imprint of the physical world.[64] Emery extends this idea to include that any product of human labour and activity is a trace of its economic processes. Artworks index the economic conditions in which they were created, implying that the photographs I produce not only depict but also participate in the logistical and economic activities of the Port — not solely as depictions of the landscape, but also as direct outcomes of those spaces.

As I have stated, bureaucratic vision is a visual byproduct of the logistical landscape, a pre-composed image infused with cultural, economic, and political processes. As a photographer, or a citizen who visits the Port of Rotterdam, I realized eventually that my task in this setting was not to create robust pictures, but to recognize and document these pre-existing "compositions." Bureaucratic vision completely undermined my values as a "profes-

62 Jacob Emery, "Art of the Industrial Trace," *New Left Review* 71 (Sept-Oct 2011), 117-133.

63 Emery, "Industrial Trace," 121.

64 Susan Sontag, *A Susan Sontag Reader* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), 350.

sional" landscape photographer, yet at the same time, I felt released from its burden of expectation, no longer ensnared within a representational dogma of conventions that I never really understood or subscribed to. The artistic act, in this instance, is substituted by the "industrial trace" as an act of appropriation — I was left to select and frame what was already existent, the composed and articulated systems of bureaucracy and logistics. Ultimately, I consider these as public photographs, echoing the position from which any member of the public may look if they so choose. Yet, they are also traces of an external, excluded position, indexing a dual view that is simultaneously public and official. In a way, my photographs reverse and turn back the gaze of bureaucratic vision on itself, exposing the official narrative as one constructed and maintained for specific purposes. These "found" photographs are acts of visual reclamation, inciting urgency in the public to not just accept the logistical landscape as a site of economic activity, but also as a site where human effort, political agendas, and economic strategies intersect.

ART HISTORY LESSON: A HANDY TRIP TO THE MUSEUM

In art history, the landscape genre historically centres the viewer, whose gaze exists beyond the frame, placing them in a position of perspectival power.[65] However, in my experiences photographing in a logistical landscape, this is not so. The roles are reversed. Breeching the boundaries of Maasvlakte, I am not the beholder, but the beholden — placed inside the Port's image, captive to its powerful gaze. Under bureaucratic vision, the beholder is a confluence of the physical site and expert knowledge that created its form and structure, while the beholden is anything that intervenes into this scene. Out here, the public are nothing more than passengers, passive receptacles for the machinations of the official view. Or rather, most experience the logistical landscape with willful ignorance, which Mitchell argues is inherent to the landscape idea, stating that landscape can only ever be a view or a representation.[66] And this is how, Mitchell states, "a landscape [...] turns site into sight, place and space into a visual image."[67] In Chapter 2, I develop this notion of site and sight in more detail. I argue that in order to comprehend the landscape, it must be engaged as a collaboration between its material and symbolic properties. There is a reciprocity at play, where site is converted into a perceptual experience, underlining the interrelationship between physical geography and interpretive processes that contribute to understanding landscape. Without this knowledge, bureaucratic vision turns landscape into an image, ensuring its passive observation.

This innate sense of passivity had me intrigued, and I struggled with articulating what it meant to be "beholden" within a physical image. To find out, I made a trip to the Mauritshuis Museum in The Hague. Dedicated to the "Golden Era" of Dutch painters, the Mauritshuis's walls are stuffed with all the classics: Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Fabritius's *Goldfinch*, Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*. I, however, went for one specific painting: Jacob van Ruisdael's *Gezicht op Haarlem*

65 Elizabeth Helsinger, "Turner and the Representation of England," in *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed., ed. W.J.T Mitchell (Chicago, University of Chicago, 2002), 105.

66 Mitchell, "Holy Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, 265.

67 Mitchell, "Holy Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, 265.

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met bleekvelden, or in English, *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Grounds* [Fig.5]. It's a beautiful painting, and shockingly small. My early photographs of the Port embody van Ruisdael's compositional patterns, indicative of how landscape painting and photography still share a common language. As Liz Wells notes, one of the basal conventions of the landscape genre is the rule of thirds.[68] In a painting, such as van Ruisdael's, the bottom third is traditionally reserved for land, mountains, or trees, while the upper two thirds receive the sky. The former may protrude into the latter, but this mathematical division may never be breeched, lest the order and harmony of pictorial representation be sullied. The top two thirds of this painting is given over to the luminous Dutch sky, drenching the photograph in atmosphere and light, with its bottom third dedicated to workable land. The horizon severs the two, its horizontal line punctured only by the spires of Haarlem's Saint Bavo's church and a series of little windmills. This is just one example of how conventions overlap between landscape photography and painting, with van Ruisdael exemplary.

68 Wells, *Land Matters*, 6.

As a viewer beholding the scene, you are perched high upon what must be a dune, while in the foreground, down below, the flat lands of Holland are spread out towards the distant town of Haarlem. A haze slightly muddles the potential crispness of the horizon, but it is still sharp enough to delineate between sky and land. In the foreground, clean white strips of what must be textiles being bleached are laid out on the ground, placed in the intermittent sunshine that breaks through the clouds, illuminating their freshly manufactured repose. Barely perceptible amongst the strips of textile are what look to be six figures, a mix of genders, working the fabric. Their clothes are not much distinguishable from the golden hues of the land itself, with subtle hints of red and black. It must be summertime. When I peer within centimetres of the picture (with a guard hovering by, ready to pounce lest I move another millimetre closer), it looks like these little labourers are wearing wide-brimmed straw hats to keep the sun off their faces. It is these six little people that cause me to stop cold. After months of photographing in the Port, it dawns on me that I am not its passive viewer — this is not a view created for my consumption and enjoyment as a sight to behold and extend my pride over a productive landscape — but rather, I am *inside* the view, trapped as much as those little workers in van Ruisdael's painting. The view has been flipped. Instead of looking upon the scene, I am a part of it, inside. So, then who is looking at me? How did the view get flipped? I wondered about those six characters down in the bleaching grounds of Haarlem — if they looked up and out of the picture, what would they see? Who would be gazing at them?

[Fig.5]

When I am photographing in the Port this inversion is clear. That is why I turned to van Ruisdael's painting, which to me is the ur-logistical landscape. Examining these minuscule figures toiling in the depths of the picture revealed to me that someone from upon high gazes outwards from an overlook, surveilling them as they work, forced into action because of this sight. This is the essence of bureaucratic vision: an outcome of particular conditions — be it the Port or Golden Era bleaching grounds — that forces a distinction between viewers and viewed. That is, who controls the initiating

point of perspective, and who becomes subjected into that view? And, if we are subjected to a beholding gaze, then how can we contest that power? The presumption I held was that a landscape (as image, photograph, or place) only exists when it is viewed or manufactured for visual consumption, and that we are its beholder. Yet in the Port, I was never placed in a position of perspectival power, I was a subject of that power. I would "enter" this official "picture," no different than one of those minuscule toiling labourers common to landscape paintings, fixed within the view of the merchant who gazes upon his land while contemplating the next possible opportunity to increase value and expansion. In a logistical landscape, the public is the subject, never the viewer. By entering this picture, we are caught within a gaze of power and control. Instead of looking *at* the scene from a position of power, we are *in* the scene, servants to bureaucratic vision. In other words, this is a question of perspective as power, where those external to the power relations become the property of that landscape. Looking intently at these little labourers gives visual shape and form to this projection of power, but it is also a reversal of seeing. Normally, the landscape is a proxy for those in control, an administrative view; rarely do we consider what it is they are looking at.

One way to visualize this role reversal is to pay attention to the horizon line, which acts as a fulcrum between the beholder (the official view) and the beholden (the public subject). In my photographs, there is always a sharp line, the horizon that severs earth from sky. Because of great distances inherent to logistical landscapes, this horizon line is at times hazy, a slightly foggy transition between land and clouds. In the distance, beyond the horizon, out of view, sits power; in the foreground, its subject. The haze of the distant horizon indicates the transition between being external to the scene, like an extra in a play directed by someone else, or as an integral part of its internal structure. It demarcates the line of actual operations, the barrier between public and private, which always proves to be inaccessible. Scrutiny is lost in the obfuscating haze of distance. The horizon is a signal, to me, that some kind of action occurs staunchly beyond sight, barely perceptible.[69] This is where logistical operations really function — *that* is the official seat of power, the same location where van Ruisdael's proverbial landowners are positioned gazing upon their productive land.

Returning to van Ruisdael's painting, one thing that strikes me is that even though these figures are quite small — generic and faceless, stand-ins for actual people — they do insist that sites of labour are never empty, no matter how much the merchant class may wish. Here is where Rancière's notion of politics is materialized. Politics, according to Rancière, is the disruption of the sensory order of the social world, offering a fundamental contestation and reconfiguration of the perceptual and participatory regimes that define everyday experience.[70] These six labourers, barely splotches of paint on canvas, are nearly invisible and inaudible, yet they assert their presence by destabilizing the naturalized order of roles by insisting that the productive landscape is never empty, but is instead a vitally human place.

69 Jason Weems, "Scale, a Slaughterhouse View: Industry, Corporeality, and Being in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago," in *Scale*, ed. Jennifer L. Roberts, Terra Foundation Essays, vol. 2 (Chicago: Terra Foundation for American Art, 2016), 117.

70 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 89.

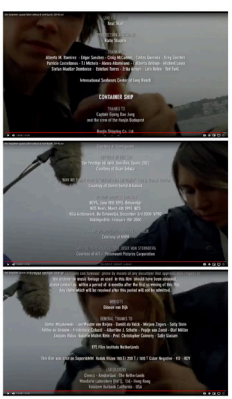
1,169 PHOTOGRAPHS OF HANDS

Looking at *Gezicht op Haarlem met bleekvelden* and staring down those six figures forced me to re-enter my own photographic archive as I was producing these photographs of bureaucratic vision: could I find disruption in my own pictures? I rummaged through every day's shoot and noticed there were 1,169 photographs of my hand. To make the panoramic photographs that encompass Bureau Mission One requires three photographs that I later digitally stitch together. To keep the boundaries between each successive set of photos that comprises the panorama, I stick my hand up in the frame of view and take a picture: always my left hand, held still for the duration of the exposure. This way, when I am editing, I can quickly establish where one panorama ends and another begins. These hand photographs I never considered as more than instrumental. They were markers, meant to be discarded and deleted once I found the "real" photographs. Depending on the exposure, the hand is usually blurry and out of focus. Due to the focal length of the lens, my hand is cropped; a thumb, palm, and some fingers intervene into the photograph, also becoming a part of the landscape. It was confronting these supposedly wasted photographs where I began to consider them as quiet, nearly invisible acts of what Rancière refers to as dissensus. While I will introduce his theories in more detail in Chapter 5, I want to use this moment to apply his notions practically through mine and a few other visual examples. Dissensus, according to Rancière, is a way of introducing new subjects and objects into the field of perception as a way to contest what he refers to as the "distribution of the sensible."[71] That is, in what ways can the political order be reconfigured to make visible that which was previously invisible or overlooked?

Something telling about my hand photographs is that in each of the 1,169 photographs, the distant logistical landscape is revealed, partially obscured by my hand, yet always managing to peek through. My hand becomes a literal intervention, a human injection into a not-very-human landscape. This photo reminds me of the end credits of Allan Sekula and Noël Burch's essay film *The Forgotten Space*, where a member of the crew begins to vigorously and laboriously wipe the lens of the camera that films her [Fig.6].[72] It is an overcast day, and the crew is in a small, orange dinghy on what looks to be a somewhat choppy inter-coastal waterway with a port complex visible in the background. Bundled up against the weather, they float aimlessly. A jaunty accordion plays as the soundtrack. The crew member vigorously wipes the lens of the camera, jostling it around as she sprays it with some kind of solvent. At times, a glimpse of the sound operator with his boom mic can be seen intervening into the frame. This goes on for about 90 seconds as the credits scroll by. It then cuts to black. The film is finished. This is common to Sekula's visual work, integrating his own body — and others's — as a way to emphasize the constructed nature of photography, addressing the role of the photographer as not simply an idle passenger caught in the act of

71 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics.*

72 *The Forgotten Space*, 2010.



[Fig.6]

observation, but as an active participant in the creation of meaning. I refer to another specific publication of Sekula's, *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes*, in Chapter 2, where in one photograph his shadow is evident, serving as a reminder that photographs are not mirrors of reality but shaped by human agency.[73] Going back to *The Forgotten Space* and the photographs of my own hand: What parallels each scene — the crew member wiping the lens clean, my hand inserted into the frame — is first, that each speaks to the opacity and occlusion that is so prevalent in maritime commerce, and second, that there is an indexical registration, or self-evidence, of the act of image-making itself. Simultaneously, an order of seeing is punctured. It is a weaving together of the imaginary and the material. This, to me, is practical dissensus.

One more example. In *Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks*, a 9-hour documentary by Chinese filmmaker Wang Bing, a once mighty industrial complex in the Chinese city of Shenyang has become saturated in rust [Fig.7]. Spanish film historian Manuel Ramos-Martinez links this presence of rust to the filmmaker's technique, which he says creates an "oxidized gaze."[74] Uncertainty is introduced through oxidation, where the viewer's expectations for spectatorship are "corroded" not just by the relentless infiltration of rust into everything, but also by the co-mingling of the factory workers's and filmmaker's bodily presence. The film is not a detached documentary but is, in fact, profoundly first-person. At times, a worker talks to Bing, who mumbles a short reply. He is restlessly present, what Ramos-Martinez states as being "in the rhythms of the factory, in its invitations and interruptions."[75] Bing is made palpable by the sound of his heavy breathing and the slight motion of the handheld camera held tight to his chest, mirroring the steady rhythm of his lungs exhaling and inhaling. The body, then, becomes a sensor.

I introduce these three examples as they each find ways to intervene into the various conditions of "bureaucratic vision" to register the body and experience as a site of and for dissensus: presence is always present, the body is a reflection of the power inherent to such sites and also of the human labour that goes into producing work. I see my 1,169 photographs of my blurred and cropped hand as an act of dissensus, enabling political existence inside the officially circumscribed zone that helps to lift the veil of bureaucratic vision.

My photographs of hands and panoramas are reflections back to the beholding view of power: I see that you see me. They reconfigure the given sensory world of the Port and, because of their deadpan depiction of bureaucratic vision, become possibilities for political engagement and transformation rather than naturalizing and legitimizing the consensus of the status quo.[76] Journeying into van Ruisdael's painting helped me see that even though I become constrained within the Port's gaze, there are ways to reconsider how I function in that site and the role that politics can play. Sekula and Bing attest to this as well. Stepping inside the picture of the Port — into the heart of bureaucratic vision — is also a refusal to look away.

[Fig.7]

73 I refer here to photography curator and author John Szarkowski, who laid out his theory of "mirrors" and "windows." Basically, the romantic "mirror" is where the photographer-artist is in control of both the medium and the message, as opposed to the realist "window," which objectively records the exterior world. See: John Szarkowski, *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography Since 1960* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, distributed by New York Graphic Society, 1978).

74 Manuel Ramos-Martínez, "The Oxidation of the Documentary: The Politics of Rust in Wang Bing's Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks," *Third Text* 29, no. 1-2 (May 2015), 10.

75 Ramos-Martínez, "Oxidation," 9.

76 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*.

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A PHOTOGRAPH OF SIMULTANEOUS SCALE

Distance is a form of withdrawal that forces a viewer to become external to the site, rescinding any moral or political claim to what that view entails.[77] Distance, literally and figuratively, severs a visitor from the site itself, and also from the social and power relations involved in its making. While it is impossible to achieve an exact accounting of the total view of any one site (and certainly not of a logistical landscape like a port), there is an expectation that an act of spectatorship could induce visible adjustment to help orient one's relationship to the logistical landscape. American urbanist Kevin Lynch noted that "it is our ancient habit to adjust to our environment, to discriminate and organize perceptually whatever is present to our senses."[78] Yet in this era where the logistical landscape leeches into domestic habitat, what forms of perception will be rendered in the wake of incredible logistical advancements that have reconfigured land into an internecine network of infrastructure, technology, and machinic processes?[79] What adaptations will have to be made to ensure a navigable relationship to these new sites? Matthew Coolidge, founder of the U.S.-based *Center for Land Use Interpretation* — of which I refer to extensively in Chapter 6 — uses the term "Homo Americanus" to ground interaction and interpretation of the American landscape, suggesting that landscape entails physical and metaphorical layers in all landscapes, even the mundane and desolate.[80] The implication is a kind of collective responsibility in relating to land. I extend Coolidge's Homo Americanus and replace it with "Homo Logisticus" to reveal how humans are deeply entwined in logistical systems that underpin modern-day life.

Amidst territory where logistics reigns, I observe that out along the isolated edges, a new perceptual pattern emerges, where distance is accepted as inevitable and natural, an incontestable terrain that is meant to function away from prying eyes. As observers and participants pushed to the fringes of logistical landscapes, it becomes nigh impossible to get proximate and interact with the topographical structure of the site, other than through a myriad of glances cast upon its surface. Because logistics produces such grand degrees of scale and distance, any shifts or modifications of land are nearly stagnant, barely present or visible. American art historian Jason Weems reiterates this point in a case study of the Chicago stockyards at the turn of the 20th century, in which he highlights the twofold role of photography in its documentation. On the one hand, photography was used to represent the sublime scale of the stockyards as an interlinked industrial system of supervision and methodical organization, displaying the grand administrative capacities for efficient animal execution and highlighting the interconnectedness of such a massive enterprise. On the other hand, photography was exemplary at reducing this abstract scale of production down to human level, registering the grim, ill-effects of such economic activity. However, at such intimate scale, Weems notes the fear of the ruling corporate authorities who sought to sanitize any photograph, thus masking the full stakes behind any representation.[81] A paradox of logistical space

77 William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

78 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1960), 92.

79 Mohsen Mostafavi and Ciro Najle, *Landscape Urbanism: A Manual for the Machinic Landscape* (London: Architectural Association, 2004).

80 The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "It Takes One: Matthew Coolidge," July 17, 2019, accessed February 19, 2024, https://www.tclf.org/it-takes-one-matthew-coolidge.

81 Weems, "A Slaughterhouse View," 106-145.

emerges: either the site is consumed as an overlook upon a sweeping vista, or as a singular, detailed level that never transcends human scale nor adequately captures the (brutal) realities of the site.

These two opposing photographs — the panorama and the detail — "provide a plausible visualization of the site's enormous scope while at the same time conveying the fundamentally fascinating inability to see or understand it in any complete way — at the very least not in a single view."[82] The logistical landscape, or "factory-as-world," as Weems calls it, can be perceived as a thing that envelops and surrounds the beholder, limiting any potential to grasp the landscape other than as a series of micro-glances or fragments, always in part, never as whole. The landscape is a "looming force" that captures and contains, complete with its own rules and logic, superseding individual agency. Without ever fully grasping the extent of the complex, the citizen exercises little authority and is subjected to an incompatible relationship to the land. "More confusing still," Weems notes, "was the fact that these two viewpoints, while largely incommensurable, often operated simultaneously."[83] In other words, an individual's perception of the logistical landscape (a port, stockyards) is mired in confusion, understood as both a massive entity and a system that transcends subjectivity.

When looking at a transnational space such as the Port of Rotterdam, the struggle is to make it more comprehensible, visible, and legible, which involves supplemental and overlapping angles of vision and description.[84] This set of photographs in Bureau Mission One, even though panorama in format. I consider them topographical records, ensuring that these views "return to the orientation and scale of the ground-based, one might even say embodied, viewer."[85] The panoramic photographs of bureaucratic vision address this idea of the Port as "factory-as-world." Later, I discuss in-depth in Bureau Mission Two what I refer to as the "topographic photograph," a set of pictures that focuses on the detailed, visceral view. Together, the panorama and detail collide in scale as tandem partners: a logistical landscape is comprised of the macro and micro, a set of larger forces (structures of circulatory capital and bureaucratic regimes) and individual human and non-human experiences (the individual view and an oil stain, for example). Each set of photographs reflects the contradictory condition of the Port, portraying the space as an outcome of simultaneous scale. While a panorama might presume to present the Port as a singular, contained entity that is comprehensible at a glance, Sekula offers a warning that all is not what it seems: "The horizontal sweep of the panorama," he states, "is revived in the form of a police ribbon at a crime scene, beyond which hidden dangers lurk."[86] Its detail counterpart has a contradictory role, too; as both Sekula and Weems point out in different logistical scenarios, the detail is also the numerical table and statistical chart, abstracting the ship or animal to facilitate industrial processes and serve as instruments that create an empirical limit to vision.[87] Thus, there is an imaginative component to such photographs, in that they refuse to allow the land to stay dormant, and instead imagine all the things that are *going on now.*

82 Weems, "A Slaughterhouse View," 109-110.

83 Weems uses "factory-as-world" with its flipside "factory-as-miniature." See: Weems, "A Slaughterhouse View," 114.

84 Weems, "A Slaughterhouse View," 119.

85 Weems, "A Slaughterhouse View," 118.

86 Allan Sekula, "Dismal Science, Part 2: From Panorama to the Detail," in *Fish Story*, ed. Allan Sekula (London: MACK, 2018), 108.

87 Sekula, "Dismal Science," 106-137. See also: Weems, "A Slaughterhouse View," 106-143.

88 Frank Breuer, "Warehouses," accessed February 25, 2024, http://www.frankbreuer.com/projekte-4-projects-4.html.

UNTITLED: A POVERTY OF MEANING

German photographer Frank Breuer produced a series of photographs called "Untitled," the title apropos, as the photographs are a sequence of deadpan portraits of warehouses somewhere in what I presume to be the European hinterland, rendered like they were architectural elevations and flattened of any spatial character into a strip of colour [Figs.8A, 8B].[88] On each warehouse, a brand name, the photographs's only discriminating detail: EPSON, Lekkerland, a Nike Swoosh™. There are no details of the land that gives any indication of their location. The captions are (frustratingly) comparatively informative, which speaks volumes to the extreme anonymity of the photos. All that is provided, for example, is Untitled, 1995–2000, and the size of the photo, say, 47 x 102 cm, or 20 x 45 cm. The photographs mimic the style of real estate photography, yet I find them too well composed and crafted to service an industrial or technical need like actual real estate photography. There is obvious artistic self-consciousness, as each phototograph is immaculately framed, conforming to the same aspect ratio of a slightly fat panorama or an elongated rectangular box. A reviewer referred to these photographs as "classically restrained" and made impersonal with "rigorous, formal framing."[89] The warehouse sits in the middle of the frame, surrounded by sky at top and cocooned by field at bottom. The obvious photographic predecessor is American photographer Lewis Baltz's 1974 series *The New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California* which also featured deadpan depictions of anonymous warehouses [Fig.9A, 9B].[90] In my view, at least Baltz's photographs adhere to a landscape politics, signalled by a condemnation and simultaneous concern for the new "oxymoronic" architectural form that was rising in the 1970s: the industrial park.[91] Allan Sekula blasts these photographs by Lewis Baltz with an excoriating critique, which, unfortunately, I can also level at Breuer's own anonymous warehouses. Sekula writes:

> Baltz's photographs of enigmatic factories fail to tell us anything about them, to recall Brecht's remark about a hypothetical photograph of the Krupp works. [...] In California, we are led to believe no one works, people merely punch in for eight hours of Muzak-soothed leisure in air-conditioned condominium-like structures that are somehow sites for the immaculate conception of commodities.[92]

Breuer's photographs suggest a commodification of the landscape, yet their uniformity and typological expression renders any recognition of that commodification into a "universal equivalent," reflecting back a form of "spiritualized abstraction" that naturalizes the economy into a sort of impersonal and monolithic appearance.[93] Such equivalence in photography, according to Sekula, creates a formalism that "collects all the world's im-

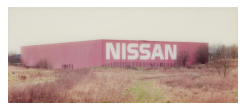
89 Elisabeth Mahoney, "Review: Frank Breuer," *The Guardian*, June 5, 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2003/jun/05/art.artsfeatures.

90 Lewis Baltz, *The New Industrial Parks Near Irvine, California* (Los Angeles: RAM / Steidl, 2001).

91 Finis Dunaway, "Beyond Wilderness: Robert Adams, New Topographics, and the Aesthetics of Ecological Citizenship," in *Reframing the New Topographics*, ed. Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), 42.

92 Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (London: MACK, 2016), 64. It is Sekula who labelled such industrial parks as "oxymoronic."

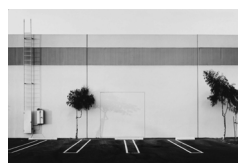
93 Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism," 53-76.



[Fig.8A]

[Fig.8B]

[Fig.9A]


[Fig.9B]

ages in a single aesthetic emporium, tearing them from all contingencies of origin, meaning, and use."[94] There is a mimetic lure of such photographs, says Italian social theorist Alberto Toscano, that is common to the depiction of logistics, where fascination with the impersonal and monolithic seems to govern photographic output, yet frequently avoids any thorough engagement with those processes.[95] Toscano goes on to write about how art and photography's odd fascination with such capital processes, such as the shipping container and its associated logistical complexes, often leads to a mimicry that define these spaces.[96] I think it is pretty clear that Breuer's "Untitled" series of photographs match this "risky replication," succumbing to abstract economic forces to depict supply-chain capitalism as just that: untitled, empty, anonymous, and, as I mentioned earlier, similar to the desert's frontier, a void ripe for capital's taking.

I can implicate myself, too, by discussing one of my own photographs. This particular one was photographed on October 31, 2020, around dusk [Fig.10]. The photograph is a three-picture panorama stitched in Photoshop. Its horizon line continues the conventions of good landscape representation — the kind I mentioned previously, where the rule of thirds in this case delegates the water to the bottom portion of the picture while the top two thirds is reserved for sky. In my view, this is also a picture of the sublime, commonly associated with the sea, but also because this photograph depicts a place where accidents happen.[97] Recall Allan Sekula's earlier quote as harbours being places where ships sink, leak, explode; gravity is a force. In other words, sublime as an attitude of mind triggered by "scale, grandeur, or wilderness." [98]

In the photograph, there are four ships lined up in a harbour basin. The first, and biggest, is Diana Shipping Line's *Houston*, followed by COSCO Shipping's *Fu Rong Feng,* then third, the *Navios Antics* of Navios Maritime Partners shipping company, and finally the fourth, though this one is too far away to read the ship's name or shipping company. The picture is washed under a haze of greenish-grey, a colour that looks not dissimilar to a busted television screen found on a scrap pile. Puncturing the horizon are steel cranes anthropomorphized into mechanical giraffes. Two of these giraffes sit near the centre of the frame, their spindles of steel compiled into triangle-like shapes. The ships, in all their varied colours, are strung along the horizon line: navy blue with a rusted red hull, blue like the Walmart logo, cherry red, black. Some text can be read, painted down the hull in white capital letters: DIANA SHIPPING INC., with the ship's name, HOUSTON. The water is rendered slick like an oil patch because of the long exposure, receding towards the horizon until sea becomes sky — or what's left of it; the weather on this day has banished blue sky in favour of a cloak of drizzle. The only land that can be seen is a small stretch of rusted steel infrastructure. Beyond, barely visible heaps of coal and ore sit in sad little piles, waiting to grow bigger and bigger with each unloading ship. They are in stasis until they reach their full size and get transferred once again, this time onto iron ore cars, and shipped by train a few hundred kilometres to Germany's Ruhr region to be melted down and transformed into various industrial units of steel (little wonder the Port of Rotterdam is often referred to as the Port of Germany).

94 Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (London: MACK, 2016), 99.

95 Alberto Toscano, "The Mirror of Circulation: Allan Sekula and the Logistical Image," *Society and Space* 36, no. 4 (2018).

96 Toscano, "The Mirror of Circulation."

97 Wells, Land Matters, 49.

98 Wells, Land Matters, 49.

[Fig.10]

10.9 km June 8, 2022 9:53 pm

MIS

#01

MIS #01

MIS

#01

MIS #01

10.6 km

April 16, 2024

6:28 pm

MIS

#01

MIS #01

10.0 km

March 29, 2024

2:14 pm

9.7 km March 25, 2024 5:05 pm

MIS #01

MIS #01

9.7 km

March 25, 2024

6:52 pm

As a photographer, I am intrigued by this flattening coat of drizzle, exemplary of the Netherlands, with water and sky slowly merging to reduce the elemental pattern of this picture into a hazy mush. The only legible features are the cranes and ships, punctuated with a few piercingly yellow lights that signal day is soon to collapse into night.

This is just one photograph; I have many more just like it. Panoramas that lovingly gaze across the logistical landscape and render in such deep detail that one could almost continually zoom in to look closer, closer, closer until all that's left is a singular pixel. They are classically sublime. If I kept photographing in such a manner, I have no doubt they would form a stunning set of panoramic vistas, expertly crafted representations of Dutch light and maritime strength — a spectacular view of logistics fit to be admired and exhibited, maybe even in the Port of Rotterdam's interpretive centre, *FutureLand*, or purchased to adorn the walls of the Port Authority's boardroom.

This was the problem. No matter how satisfying I found them, the photographs were odes to supply-chain capitalism, focusing primarily on the processes of commodity movement. I had hoped that my photographs would serve like a compass within the transformations of contemporary capitalism, and instead, they were simply mirrors reflecting back the singular and official point of view[99] — and even denying other points of view. The photographs did, however, provoke guiding questions: how else can the Port be experienced, other than officially? In which ways can a logistical landscape be viewed other than as its own self-representation? What other kinds of vision lay latent in such sites, that do not succumb to the official view, but instead add to or re-imagine it?

These early photographs of mine (like Breuer's) are commodities, not photographs, echoing Sekula's admonition that "as a privileged commodity fetish, as an object of connoisseurship, the photograph achieves its ultimate semantic poverty."[100] However, I introduce a counterweight to both mine and Breuer's photography. Dutch photographer Bas Princen's *Artificial Acadia*[101] is an example of a photographic project that intervenes into the official world with public incision [Fig.11]. Princen's series of photographs were made in the southern Dutch province of North Brabant, photographed amidst engineered forests placed between Dutch villages. Princen discovered that these liminal spaces of artificiality were being appropriated as zones for leisure and recreation.[102] Photographed on a large format camera from a relatively elevated angle, the photographs are immaculate and expertly crafted. The Dutch weather plays a crucial role, glazing each of the photos in a seemingly serene and gentle haze. The photographs are exemplary of the manufactured landscape: polders, gravel piles ready for work, sculpted dunes, concrete piers, parcelled tracts of land. I use this series as a counterpoint to Breuer's works because Princen's photographs are ideal landscape photographs showcasing his ability to recognize and reproduce stellar moments of unique situations within a stunning landscape. They are, to me, aspirational photographs that I easily imagine could have been reflective of my own work in the Port. On the surface, they skirt dangerously close to anaesthetizing paradoxical beauty, reproducing these locations in pictur-

99 Toscano, "The Mirror of Circulation."

100 Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism," 60.

101 Bas Princen, *Artificial Arcadia* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2004).

102 Maartje van den Heuvel and Tracy Metz, eds. *Nature as Artifice: New Dutch Landscape in Photography and Video Art* (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2008), 200.

[Fig.11]

esque form and obscuring any environmental considerations of this particular artificial landscape. However, Princen makes two decisions. First, he invited a sociologist and landscape architect to comment on the artificiality of the Dutch landscape and its perception and use, centring landscape within multi-disciplinary interpretation.[103] Second, look closer at his photographs and consider the latter part of the title: *Arcadia*. The implication here is that these spaces have been transformed into leisure zones beyond their intended use as productive land; ordinary citizens have refused to abide by the intentions of the planners. Their experience of landscape resides outside traditional expectations of nature and perception. Here in Princen's photographs are an array of activities within inhospitable landscapes, turning what is ostensibly official space into public place, proving that landscape is a negotiation, always ready for its meaning to be contested, regardless of how authority wants it to be portrayed, considered, and used.

THE LOGISTICAL LANDSCAPE AS A GEO-PHOTOGRAPHIC

The late American artist Robert Smithson would probably have been content in the Port of Rotterdam. Out here, heavy industry, maritime logistics, exurban development, and geologic transformation all conform to Smithson's evocation of landscape. In his eyes, landscape is in constant flux and decay, shaped by both nature and human intervention. He took particular interest in marginal landscapes like quarries and industrial wastelands, sites, similar to the Port, that are littered with "fragmentation, corrosion, decomposition, [and] disintegration, [...] everywhere in evidence."[104] Smithson's account manufactures landscape as an act of art, echoing Marshall McLuhan's exhortation of the planet becoming a potential artwork.[105]

He refused to let such landscapes remain static and anonymous, an ideal outcome for bureaucratic vision. Instead, he recognized that sites of "zero panorama" were more than just locations for pictorial representation but profound opportunities for deeper engagement with industrialized artifacts that are "sprawling and embedded in the landscape."[106] Smithson considered the industrial landscape a giant picture, noting:

> [how the] noonday sunshine cinema-ized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an over-exposed picture. Photographing it with my Instamatic 400 was like photographing a photograph.... When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel, and underneath the river existed as an enormous movie film that showed nothing but a continuous blank.[107]

This sentiment echoes American social media theorist Nathan Jurgenson's concept of the "camera eye," which suggests the contemporary moment

103 van den Heuvel and Metz, *Nature as Artifice*, 200.

104 Robert Smithson, "The Crystal Land," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 9.

105 McLuhan's full quote: "If the planet itself has thus become the content of a new space created by its satellites, and its electronic extensions, if the planet has become the content and not the environment, then we can confidently expect to see the next few decades devoted to turning the planet into an artform." See: Marshall McLuhan, cited in John O'Brian and Peter White, eds., *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 48.

106 On zero panorama, see: Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 72. On industrial artifacts, see: Robert Smithson, "Conversation in Salt Lake City," interview by Gianni Pettena, *Domus* (November 1972), 298, quoted in Jeffrey Kastner, "Rich in Reference: Thoughts on Land Art's Infrastructural Legacy," in *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism*, ed. Nato Thompson (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House; New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), 36.

107 Smithson, "Monuments of Passaic," 70.

as a pre-figured image, ready for documentation without the need for further arrangement, indicating what any citizen would see in such an environment.[108]

In a series of artworks on the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, Canadian artist and scholar Susan Schuppli called this petrochemical disaster "natural cinema," an event that can be viewed as if it is a "photosensitive array" registering information as much as a photograph or film can.[109] For Schuppli, these are "dirty pictures": anthropogenic environments that document their own damaged condition.[110] In a previous article, I introduced how Schuppli's concept of dirty pictures moves beyond the representation of a terrible event — "gushing crude, oil-soaked birds, and dead fish washing ashore"[111] — to the very making of a ruinous image formed by oil's molecular transformation that refracts light, "thus constructing a toxic, dirty image that we inhabit."[112] Other examples of a dirty picture are the plumes of "coal smoke" that create "such thick haze and fog that it modifies the visible spectrum of light; the toxic legacy of industrial seepage that warps the landscape; [or the] decaying factory oxidizing from view the labourers who once worked there."[113] Each of these examples are testament to the processes of capitalism at its most unfettered. In other words, the logistical landscape exposes its own picture, as much as the technical device I use to represent it.

What Schuppli portends is the question of photographic authorship and the status of photographs as produced in a logistical landscape. As Schuppli states, today's massive industrial, technological, and ecological manipulation of land is already a medium, "organized by the found footage of nature itself" into visible traces that record their own condition in (geo)-photographic form.[114] She considers industrialized land as "geo-photo-graphic," with the camera functioning as an extension of the natural world.[115] This demarcates a shift in the photograph from metaphor to inscriptive surface, conjuring the British inventor of early photographic technology Henry Fox Talbot's "pencil of nature"[116] — with the caveat that this is not the bucolic, untouched Nature of the past, but a transformed and industrialized form of nature that transcends the artificially reproduced environments of "second nature" to give us instead an even more contemporary formation: "third nature."[117]

Dutch landscape architect Adriaan Geuze, partly responsible for the public design of Maasvlakte, said that its landscape "provides a cinematic sensation that you will not experience anywhere else."[118] It is a "cinema-ized" site, where, as Sekula states, "[...] the photograph is seen as a re-presentation of nature itself, as an unmediated copy of the real world. The power of this folklore of pure denotation is considerable. It elevates the photograph to the legal status of document and testimonial."[119] The photograph is already produced, a form of testimony attesting to its own representation. Photographs of bureaucratic vision reveal an ideology that is left exposed, ready to be challenged, or even accepted, by the public.

Similar to Smithson, who viewed the camera as a "synthesizer" of nature

108 Nathan Jurgenson, *The Social Photo: On Photography and Social Media* (London: Verso, 2019).

109 Andreas Petrossiants, "74 Million Million Million Tons," Brooklyn Rail, July 2018, accessed February 29, 2024, https://brooklynrail.org/2018/07/artseen/74-million-million-million-tons.

110 Susan Schuppli, "Dirty Pictures," in *Living Earth: Field Notes from the Dark Ecology Project 2014-2016*, ed. Mirna Belina (Amsterdam: Sonic Acts Press, 2016), 190-208.

111 Donald Weber, "Dirty Pictures: Rupturing the Common Picture of Globalisation," *Trigger*, no. 2 (2020): 48.

112 Schuppli, "Dirty Pictures," 190-208.

113 Weber, "Dirty Pictures," 48.

114 Schuppli, "Dirty Pictures," 193.

115 Schuppli, "Dirty Pictures," 191.

116 Henry Fox Talbot draws the analogy of a pencil that is able to draw with light, harnessing the natural world's ability to imprint itself as an indexical trace, making the camera not dissimilar to a pencil as welded by nature. See: Henry Fox Talbot, "The Pencil of Nature," (book transcribed to website), accessed February 29, 2024, https://www.thepencilofnature.com.

117 Irish ecocritical theorist Axel Goodbody introduces German literary scholar Hartmut Böhme's concept of third nature as a complex of technological, ecological, cultural, and mediated conditions where nature is not just transformed but constructed. See: Axel Goodbody, "Nature as a Cultural Project," in Nature, Technology and Cultural Change in Twentieth-Century German Literature: New Perspectives in German Studies (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Nature is simulated, managed, even replaced by technological systems "in which pollutants and all kinds of debris of the industrial culture serve as probe heads or contrast agents to understand the complex dynamics of uncontrollable and often little understood eco-systems like the oceans (or the human organism)." See: Alexander Klose, "Extraction—Production—Destruction: On the Contradictory Productivity of Oily Images," Resolution Magazine no. 1 (2021): 27.

118 Marinke Steenhuis, "Adriaan Geuze on the Port of Rotterdam: Pride, Comfort, and Compassion," in *The Port of Rotterdam: World Between City and Sea*, ed. Adriaan Geuze et al. (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2016), 195.

119 Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (London: MACK, 2016), 5.

and an abstraction that could merge each distinct realm through its chemical and mechanical processes, the photographs of bureaucratic vision are a "quasi-cartographic gauge," a kind of "map that tells you where the piece is."[120] In this context, photography is simultaneously a tool of observation and an instrument that merges with the physical reality of the landscape. The camera's mechanical, mineralogical, and temporal functions are reflections and indexes of natural — and industrial — processes.[121]

120 Alexander R. Bigman, "A Synthesis of Nature and Abstraction: Unearthing Robert Smithson's Minimalist Theory of Photography," *History of Photography* 44, no. 2-3 (May-August 2020): 201.

121 Robert Smithson, "Art Through the Camera's Eye," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 371-375.

CONCLUSION: MOVING ON

With the conclusion of Bureau Mission One, I have navigated the intersection of land, bureaucracy, and vision by introducing the Port of Rotterdam and its formation as an official landscape. Furthermore, I have introduced how logistics produces what I label "bureaucratic vision." As demonstrated, the logistical landscape is more than a transit node. It is a dynamic enterprise containing an admixture of visibility, control, economic might, and human experience to coalesce in profound and contradictory ways, establishing a narrative of power and authority. Under this rigid framework, bureaucratic vision arises, influencing public perception and also stabilizing an official mythology of the Port as sole representative of future-oriented progress. Out here, the public is relegated to a passive role, entangled within the maw of such perspectival power. This section, then, is the foundational ground for all subsequent research, a tableau to reveal how logistics operates not just as a physical site, but as a complex socio-political arena that has consequences for all.

However, this is not just research about logistical landscapes, but about how such landscapes may be made legible through landscape photography. Therefore, the ground conditions of bureaucratic vision are also the conditions that effect where and how I operate as a photographer. Being subjected to bureaucratic vision means I have to confront this voluble mixture of visibility, power, and control, and how such a confluence poses a unique and forbidding challenge to how I practice landscape photography. Moving forward, I propose a landscape photography that does more than depict — but interpret, critique, reconstruct, and act as a conduit that contests official narratives to envision a reimagined and reconfigured Port that exists beyond its authoritative remit.

With the groundwork and relevant issues laid bare, the next three chapters step back to examine landscape as a history, concept, and practice. This approach addresses concerns raised in Bureau Mission One on how historical conventions of landscape practice are disturbed by the logistical, and in what ways such limitations can be addressed. By unraveling the term landscape, the next chapter begins the recovery process and explores how landscape photography may contest and redefine what a landscape is in today's modern era of logistical operations.

9.1 km March 29, 2024 2:23 pm

MIS #01

MIS #01

8.6 km

March 26, 2024

7:05 pm

MIS

#01

8.3 km
May 5, 2021
9:28 pm

8.0 km June 7, 2021 9:44 pm

MIS

#01

MIS #01

7.5 km March 23, 2024 7:17 pm

MIS

#01

#01 MIS

7.5 km March 25, 2024 5:29 pm

MIS

#01

BLUE

Peter and I arrive to the distripark and look around.

“Already one (crushed) Red Bull can,” says Peter.
“Teenagers,” I say.
“No,” Peter says. “Migrant workers.”

Sure, I think. That makes sense. I look out to the horizon; their places of work lurking in the distance, low slung boxes sitting heavy on the edge, clad in a metal sheeting the colour of dead pixels. I applaud myself on the William Gibson reference, having cleverly updated it for modern times. I don’t really see anything except the four lanes of the N15 leading to the six lanes of the A15 highway that eventually leads to eight lanes bisecting the space between me and those dead pixels. There’s a big blue sign that says Havens 7200-8500 / Havens 8500-9900 / Distripark Maasvlakte / Maasvlakte Plaza; its partner: *FutureLand*, Strand Maasvlakte | 600m. Not helpful. Still nothing to orient me. I see a digital clock affixed atop a warehouse. It’s now 11:32am. We’ve spent 15 minutes gazing out to the horizon and staring at crushed Red Bull cans.
“Found two more,” says Peter.

***

EIGEN TERREIN VERBODEN TOEGANG Art. 361 says another blue sign. It’s a very Dutch sign, neatly encamped into the ground, like a precision missile that failed to explode. We walk anyway; Peter wants to look at some garbage cans. He tells me a story about them. I note the name of the cans in my notebook: *Blikvanger*, otherwise known in English as a can-catcher. It’s also a pun: eye-catcher. He chuckles at the humour of it. I do not. My Dutch is yet to grasp puns. We peer into a blikvanger: cigarette packs, crushed and discarded. Walk to the next one, peek inside again: same thing, but this time, another Red Bull can (crushed) and a little plastic spliff holder. Empty, of course. The spliff has been smoked. We repeat, twelve blikvanger in a row, each one not showing anything new except what we’ve already seen. Cigarette packs, the odd crushed Red Bull can, plastic spliff holders. Nothing else.

“Told you it was migrant workers,” says Peter.

He’s now counted more than 15 (crushed) Red Bull cans. The little plastic spliff holders mark those who are not from Holland. No Dutch person,

Peter says, would ever buy a pre-roll. Foreigners. Polish, probably.

At the end of the two-lane slipway lined with the blikvanger, a poster hangs from a lamppost under a bicycle route marker (#91, not sure where it goes except just follow the arrow), and a yield sign:

WIJ ZIJN FUNDAMENT, DE ADVISEUR VOOR JOUW HYPOTHEEK.

A little picture with four happy middle-aged mortgage brokers, three women, and one man. Those must be the potential advisors. Or actors? A toll-free phone number is listed and the name of the company: Fundament. GA NAAR!

I look around. The only thing I see are trucks: DHL, Koopman, Hoogvliet, Dobbe Transport. I think of a truck driver, and his thought as he passes the little billboard.

"Shit," he might exclaim. "I gotta call my mortgage advisor!"

***

The clouds are out, just how I like them. Fluffy, bulbous, tinged with a hint of grey. Not quite the colour of dead pixels, this grey is more… lively. Like when you press your finger on an LCD screen and see the little splotches of colour that seep out around that temporary puncture mark. That colour. I want a little bit of blue, though. But not too much.

The colour blue and I have a tempestuous relationship. There's a very specific shade I prefer: Imagine you are about ten years old, and you're at some kind of fair. You've behaved, and so your parents allow you to buy candy. You choose the cotton candy, the lively, billowing bundle configured as an infinite array of fine threads of refined sugar (as a Canadian, this would be from the Redpath Sugar Co., "Crafting Sugar Since 1854") — I always chose the blue flavour over pink or green. Now, close your eyes, lean in just a bit, open your mouth ever so slightly and lightly moisten your lips. The sugar melts. Press your lips into the cotton candy; it fades and fades and fades, rapidly disintegrating, just like the former Redpath Sugar refinery once disintegrated in the old Port of Toronto, where it's quadrant of four concrete silos, originally built in the 1950s, was blown up to make room for new real estate development. That's how cotton candy countered by a force of moistened lips behaves, too. Rapid disintegration until there's no more. Open your eyes; look at the cheap piece of paper rolled into a slight cone, those threads of pleasure are now mostly gone. Just traces of cotton-like sugar,

with a hint of blue food colouring, tangled in the hairs of your arm and hands and, if it was a vigorous eating session, glued to your face. That's the colour of blue I like. My camera, though, hates blue.

***

Perhaps I am being harsh on Camera: what I really mean, is that Sensor hates blue, at least, *my* kind of blue. Okay, even more specifically, the complementary-metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) sensor takes *my* blue and renders it… like an Albert Heijn blue. Or a Hoogvliet blue. Or the blue from Facebook (*the worst*). These are blues rendered from the hexadecimal 8-bit RGB system, shades that only exist as a series of numbers and letters strung together in elaborate code and always preceded with a #. The best blue my sensor can muster is that of the colour of Ocean seen at zoom-level 00 through zoom-level 18 in Google Maps (I confirmed this with Dutch designer Joost Grootens, whose dissertation Blind Maps and Blue Dots was all about this).

I always imagine my camera's sensor to be like a sheet of sticky flypaper. Instead of tricking annoying flies onto its landing strip of fly-death, the sensor seduces the rays of the sun and bounds this primal light inside a microscopic waffle grid. In analogue photochemical processes, the light was rebellious and unruly, settling onto the plastic strips in their own way and own organization — like a collective anarchist group settling in the woods for a long fight against the coal mine that seeks expansion into the nearest village. My CMOS sensor, though, is anything but rebellious. It is a corporate sellout, looking to flatten and organize and arrange the photons of light into a neatly arranged agglomeration — a multi-national corporation as accumulated through hostile takeover, or, have you ever seen that Instagram account @midtownuniform showing pictures of identical (mostly) men dressed in their branded Patagonia vests and cheekily always captioned with names such as Brad, Thad, Chad, or Hoxton and Broxton? That's how a CMOS sensor works. Unifying, flattening, algorithmically aligning light into — dare I say it — a landscape of logistically controlled functions.

"Blue" is just a condition to be computationally re-arranged, a simulacrum "close-enough" to reality that I'll succumb and take a picture anyway.

***

Click.
I take a photograph.
Peter finds another (crushed) can.

CH 01

LAND-SCAPE'S ETYMO-LOGICAL ORIGINS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Having established the criteria of the logistical landscape through an extensive visual and textual exploration of the Port of Rotterdam, this chapter turns to its conceptual parent — landscape. I investigate how this term has evolved across varied disciplines and discourses throughout the centuries, rendering it both ambiguous and generative.

Landscape is a way of seeing.[122] Landscape is an instrument to decode culture.[123] Landscape is a representational practice.[124] Landscape is a symbolic order that creates meaning.[125] Landscape reproduces values and norms.[126] Landscape is a real life scene.[127] Landscape is work.[128] Landscape is a photograph.[129] Landscape is ambiguous.[130] As the American geographer Don Mitchell says, "Landscape is at once patently obvious and terrifically mystified."[131] I would never leave the computer I am typing these words on if I was to elaborate and give justice to all the various meanings and purposes of landscape, and how the term — the word itself — has accumulated ambiguity over time and circulation.[132]

Landscape is a usable, productive, and generous phrase that situates my artistic practice as both a condition of cultural production (photography), and adequately responds to the logistical condition of the present day. As a landscape photographer, it is necessary to pinpoint my own little plot of land in this ambiguous field in order to articulate landscape's meaning in a way that has relevance for my practice. While I cannot shave it down to a simplistic set of either/or (lest I also contribute to stabilizing, and thus, naturalizing its meaning), there are a few values of landscape that I will elaborate upon in this chapter.[133]

Such an abundance of meaning prompts my central research question: to what extent can landscape photography assist in making the complex infrastructures and operations of logistical landscapes legible? First, I want to start with an etymological excursion into the word's bifurcated status: *land-* and *-scape*, where each segment is loaded with assorted connotations. Land, in particular, proves crucial to the landscape practice I am arguing for. Then, I pay particular attention to the term's economic roots and its close association to the Dutch historical notion of *Landschap*.

By burrowing inside the word *landscape* and inspecting its differences, I look for clues that inch towards answering my central research question. This is not a new idea; many scholars and writers, such as theorist of visual culture W.J.T. Mitchell and landscape essayist J.B. Jackson, have each ripped into the word like a Christmas present, excited at the potential of a closer examination.[134] But in this chapter, I want to know about a particular condition of landscape: how does it relate to the (contemporary) use of land as a logistical condition, yet still embrace the demands and histories of landscape as a photographic genre? By dissecting landscape's meaning, is it possible to find a more discrete, specific definition of landscape that is suitable for my own photographic practice, one that nimbly navigates what I argue are new condi-

122 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

123 Carl O. Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

124 Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

125 Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, "Introduction: Iconography and Landscape," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments*, eds. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-10.

126 Berger, *Ways of Seeing*. See also: Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

127 Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon, *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 6-8.

128 Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 2.

129 Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

130 Donald Meinig, "Reading the Landscape: An Appreciation of W. G. Hoskins and J. B. Jackson," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Donald Meinig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 1.

131 Mitchell, The *Lie of the Land*, 2.

132 Gillian Rose, "Afterword: Gazes, Glances and Shadows," in *Studying Cultural Landscapes*, ed. Iain Robertson and Penny Richards (London: Arnold, 2003), 165.

133 William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991).

tions and formations of land and social structures? Landscape, as this chapter reveals, is a generous word infused with historical and ideological meaning, enduring for decades, even centuries. All it takes is a degree of scrutiny to open up its possibilities to address specific conditions that I have centred around land-use and photography.

1.2 "THE WORD ITSELF..."

Landscape is a compound word, formed by mashing *land* into *scape*, with each having multiple legacies. Historically, the two sutured components entered into the European lexicon in around the 5th century AD by way of Germanic roots before branching into various versions such as in Old English — *landskipe, landscipe, landscaef;* German — *Landschaft*; and the Dutch *landschap*, with additions from Danish, Swedish, and others.[135] While each of these versions share Indo-European roots, they all have their own variation and are not necessarily equivalent. The German Landschaft, for example, denotes an administrative unit, whereby a common entity is bound by regional relations and bureaucratic arrangement, connoting some form of recognizable ownership by an individual or a group, designating it with distinctly territorial meaning.[136] The companion suffix to *-scape* — *-ship* — implies a collection, such as the inhabitants of a village or the territory of a particular settlement, spawning, for example, the English word "township". This is not far removed from other historical Northern European definitions of landscape, which presumed legal and political divisions of land.[137] In English, the contemporary general agreement of landscape is understood as a framing of scenery, whereby an arrangement of various components across a natural vista are meant to be gazed upon either through a pictorial representation, or as an overlook.[138]

J.B. Jackson, in his 1984 essay "The Word Itself," introduces skepticism towards this predominantly visual definition of landscape, questioning how it became fixed to mean a very specific thing: as a picture, either in the literal sense (a picture of a view), and the view itself.[139] Historically, our vision was transformed and shaped by artists (and, later, in the 18th and 19th century, via landscape designers, gardeners, and others who shaped the land into compositions), who smoothed out the view and focused intently on the not-so-realistic features of a landscape: the babbling brooks and quaint fields of flowers and greenery, the pretty little animals stalking up on hay, and the like.[140] In this evolution, landscape suggests is mediated by artists and designers for a greater act of appreciating and reproducing standardized forms of beauty.

British anthropologist Tim Ingold argued against this idea of landscape as purely visual, stating that such visual fixation is nothing more than an etymological aberration. For Ingold, exploring the historical and cultural roots of the word is a way to upend decades of what he frames as historical misunderstanding.[141] His project is to shove landscape into a more sustained and cohesive relationship with the physical earth and as an everyday practice, arguing that landscape's meaning was incorporated "into the language of painterly depiction," leading scholars "to mistake the connotations of the suffix *-scape*

134 For Mitchell's inquiry, see: W. J. T. Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1. For Jackson, see: J.B. Jackson, "The Word Itself," in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 3-8.

135 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 5.

136 Kenneth R. Olwig, "Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86, no. 4 (1996): 631.

137 Kenneth Olwig, "Sexual Cosmology: Nation and Landscape at the Conceptual Interstices of Nature and Culture, Or, What Does Landscape Really Mean?," in *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, ed. Barbara Bender (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 307-343.

138 Cosgrove, *Social Formation*.

139 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 3.

140 Jackson explicitly mentions the landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted who designed parks and gardens in a "painterly way." See: Jackson, "The Word Itself," 3.

141 Tim Ingold, "Landscape or Weather-World?," in *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011), 126-27.

for a particular 'scopic regime' of detailed and disinterested observation."[142]

In other words, landscape became enfolded into the world of appearances rather than material presence, succumbing to what Ingold refers to as the "art of description" and modernist art history.[143] Ingold notes that *-scape* comes from the Greek *skopos*, literally translated as "the target of the bowman, the mark towards which he gazes as he aims."[144] A derivative of *skopos* is the verb *skopein* which means to look.[145] *-Scape* is often used to mean any kind of metaphorical or literal space. Jackson, expressing slight exasperation on this fixation, said: "Thus we find mention of the 'landscape of a poet's images,' the 'landscape of dreams,' or 'landscape as antagonist,' or the 'landscape of thought."[146] What he does sanction in this instance, though, is the need for some kind of word or phrase that makes concessions for vivid thought and relations that place us in the world, even if it is as a backdrop for those actions. *-Scape*, and its genealogical brethren *-skipe*[147] (or, alternately spelled *-skip, -scipe*, and *-scaef)*,[148] following Jackson and Ingold, are not to be considered descendants of the scopic, but rather, they are closely related to scrape and shape, as in to cut or create, making landscape both social and spatial.[149] It is this notion of shaping that has profound effect on how I view, and practice, landscape, a topic on which I will elaborate further shortly.

In the first half of the 20th century in the United States, geographer Carl O. Sauer was deeply influenced by landscape's Germanic *Landschaft* roots.[150] Utilizing this etymological knowledge, he tethered land and community to form an assemblage of natural and cultural features whereupon the earth's surface could be summoned in a glance and studied.[151] Sauer's primary contribution was the idea of what he termed cultural geography, enabling landscape to function beyond its scenic status and instead examine how these assembled elements were shaped and influenced by culture and topography. In Chapter 2, I mainly use references from cultural geography precisely because of this point, building out a conception of landscape that reflects a contemporary notion of land use. Sauer famously said: "The cultural landscape is fashioned from the natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result."[152] In other words, it is about the place itself rather than an image of that place.[153]

Today, landscape study has moved beyond Sauer's morphological notion and is mostly associated with its visual character, due to the connotation of the suffix *-scape,* which defaults to the optical or visual.[154] I concur with Jackson's contention that as our place in the world becomes more and more uncertain, we must seek out ever and more sustained relationships with our environs.[155] In my view, as landscape twists in the wind and retreats from its original meaning (that is, as a surface of the earth), it functions as nothing more than a simulacrum of the real thing, a repository of artistic devices designed to produce scenic views. But landscape is real; it helps create a shared reality and possibly offers us a sustainable relationship with our contemporary moment.

The next logical growth for the definition of the word, and where my particular interests lay, is extending its meaning to incorporate characteristics that encompass the complex interplay of socio-economic forces that shapes the physical environment through particular flows of capital.[156] However, this is only a partial definition, as it does not fully answer for the role of landscape

142 Ingold, "Landscape or Weather-World?," 126-127.

143 I presume Ingold is cheekily referencing Dutch art historian Svetlana Alpers's seminal history of Dutch landscape painting of the 17th century, *The Art of Describing*. See: Ingold, "Landscape or Weather-World?," 126.

144 Ingold, "Landscape or Weather-World?," 126.

145 Ingold, "Landscape or Weather-World?," 126.

146 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 4.

147 Cosgrove, *Social Formation*, 193.

148 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 4.

149 Kenneth Olwig, "Performing on the Landscape versus Doing Landscape: Perambulatory Practice, Sight and the Senses of Belonging," in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, eds. Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 81-91.

150 Paul Groth and Chris Wilson, "The Polyphony of Cultural Landscape Study: An Introduction," in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*, eds. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 5.

151 Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape."

152 Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," 343.

153 Groth and Wilson, "Polyphony," 1-22.

154 Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose, eds., *Deterritorialisations: Revisioning Landscape and Politics* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2003), 13.

155 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 8.

156 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

photography in how those landscapes can be made legible. Therefore, landscape, as I frame it for my practice, needs to encompass properties that mediate experience and engagement with these spaces alongside its physical shaping. This point is more thoroughly elaborated in Chapter 2.

1.3 THE LAND OF LANDSCAPE

Jackson preferred landscape to return to understanding as a "concrete, three-dimensional, shared reality."[157] This implies firsthand experience with everyday environs, but also includes the collective drawing of understanding of who and how we are today (and how we were and will be). That is why in the ensuing section, I seize upon the prefix *land-* as a way to explore landscape's condition as a possible terrain for aesthetics and political organization.[158] By aesthetics in relation to politics, I mean in the most fundamental sense, which involves the capacity to discern something, rather than overlook it.[159] But I enter this discussion later in Chapter 5. Moving on, the signification of land etymologically is as soil or earth, as well as meaning a portion of the surface of the globe.[160] An early Gothic iteration was "plowed field." In old Anglo-Saxon meaning, land was sovereign territory, be it a tiny plot of plowed land or a national entity, as long as there were recognized borders.[161] In North American understanding, land is "any *definite* site regarded as a portion of the earth's surface, and extending in both vertical directions by law."[162] Land, then, with over two thousand years of etymological transformation, has all kinds of inherent differences. My focus here is on certain topographical arrangements. Land is space as defined by boundaries, inscribed through legalistic and bureaucratic measures, though not always apportioned by walls and fences.[163] This inscription of land as an inherent part of landscape understanding is made clear by the Swedish geographer Kenneth Olwig, who states that the "various uses of the term landscape [...] suggest that the landscape is an area carved out by axe and plough, which belongs to the people who have carved it out. It carries suggestion of being an area of cultural identity based, however loosely, on tribal and/or blood ties."[164] What unites its varying meanings, as formed over the centuries, is that land has always implied a space as defined by rules and administrative procedures.

But to fully comprehend landscape in its productive and organizing capacity, I have to make a small retreat and revisit the suffix *-scape*. Jackson points out that in some of its earliest understanding (mirroring Ingold's point), *-scape* implied a composition of similar objects, derived from the word sheaf: a bundle of stalks or plants such as in a wheat sheaf.[165] *-Scape*, in this instance, infers the verbs to scrape and to shape, accumulating the notion of a collection or gathering. Jackson informs that: "Old English, or Anglo-Saxon, seems to have contained several compound words using the second syllable — scape or its equivalent — to indicate collective aspects of the environment. It is much as if the words had been coined when people began to see the complexities of the man-made world."[166] Landscape, Jackson exhorts, should be declared as "a composition of man-made or man-modified spaces to serve as infrastructure or background for our collective existence; and if background seems inappropriately modest, we should remember that in our modern use of the

157 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 5.

158 Keller Easterling, *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and Its Political Masquerades* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 63.

159 Margus Vihalem, "Everyday Aesthetics and Jacques Rancière: Reconfiguring the Common Field of Aesthetics and Politics," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 10, no. 1 (2018).

160 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 6.

161 J.B. Jackson, "A Pair of Ideal Landscapes," in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 49.

162 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 6. Emphasis in the original.

163 Easterling, *Enduring Innocence*, 63.

164 Olwig, "Sexual Cosmology," 311.

165 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 7. Also, the Wheat Sheaf is the name of the first bar in the city of Toronto, and it is still there, and serves really good chicken wings, half-price every Monday night.

166 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 7.

word it means that which underscores not only our identity and presence but also our history."[167] What I gather from Jackson and Ingold is the primal need for humans to arrange and organize themselves into discrete entities within a collective framework to help make sense of the burgeoning complexity of everyday life, reflected in a discovery Jackson relates from the 19th century usage of the word waterscape. While a picturesque definition might imply the bucolic settling of a brook — perhaps a chugging waterfall with a few serfs relaxing on the water's edge — it is in fact, as Jackson notes, something quite different. This waterscape was a collection of pipes and aqueducts, a complex ur-infrastructure that served a mill and residence.[168] To me, this is a crucial distinction and has major relevance for how I settle on landscape. *-Scape*, in this view, can be read as an organizational system working on the level of infrastructure, gathering together vital components to ensure the reproductive capacity of social life. While this etymological curve does not displace the scopic meaning of *-scape*, it reinforces Jackson's point that "Nevertheless the formula landscape as a composition of man-made spaces on the land is more significant than it first appears, for if it does not provide us with definition, it throws a revealing light on the origin of the concept."[169]

A sojourn through these etymological iterations of landscape and their attendant prefixes and suffixes gathers together a complex formulation, one that speaks directly to arrangement and organization that in turn shape social conditions. In a logistical context, such arrangements become diffuse. Land is at once local and global, physical and virtual, yet still under political, economic, and administrative control.[170] This etymological foray is part of my recovery effort to contribute to a sharper conception of landscape that proves more relevant to my purposes. I issue a rejoinder that a Jacksonian embrace of shared reality insists that landscape's prefix — land — is crucial to understanding the logistical landscape. Jackson said that as new conditions (such as logistics) reorganize space, we must, in this contemporary moment, recognize a new definition of landscape to face these shifting conditions. But I would add a modifier: landscape photography could also be included to expand a definition that better matches these logistical times.

1.4 LANDSCHAP AS AN IMAGE OF THE ECONOMY

It is the Golden Era Dutch who did the most to affix visual meaning to the modern lexicon of landscape, tying it to a composition of the visible world through careful depictions of real-life scenes through the genre of painting.[171] Later, that notion of *Landschap*, the development of land as sculpted and on view for visual consumption, would influence, for example, the development of English gardens, parks, and country estates.[172] However, I want to sustain focus on Ingold and Jackson's aforementioned resurrection of *-scape* as a means of shaping: giving form to land that produces an outcome of material consequence. In this section, I concentrate on the Dutch meaning of *Landschap* and its etymological entanglement of land and imagery and its correlation to depicting economic infrastructure. In my view, pulling apart *Landschap* and paying attention to its variant meanings is a generative method for both landscape and landscape photography, within a logistical context, to realign

167 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 8.

168 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 7.

169 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 7-8.

170 Clare Lyster, *Learning from Logistics: How Networks Change Our Cities* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2016), 5. See also: Easterling, *Enduring Innocence*, 63-64.

171 Wells, *Land Matters*, 28. For a seminal overview of how Dutch art, particularly from the 17th century, reshaped the concept of landscape and contributed significantly to modern understanding, see: Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

172 Stephen Daniels, "Goodly Prospects: English Estate Portraiture, 1670-1730," in *Mapping the Landscape*, ed. Nicholas Alfrey and Stephen Daniels (Nottingham, UK: Castle Museum, 1990).

land- and *-scape* as conditions for site and sight, on which I will elaborate in the subsequent chapter.

First, the Dutch *-schap* is not a standalone word in common modern Dutch, nor is it a verb.[173] It is primarily a suffix that carries significant meaning when used in the formation of nouns describing states, conditions, or collectives, similar to the English suffix *-ship* (as in relationship, friendship, partnership). In Dutch, *burgemeesterschap* and *lidmaatschap* mean "mayorship" and "membership," respectively, with *de maatschap* and *de vennootschap* denoting "the partnership" and "the company."[174] As such, *-schap* implies an underlying action of creation or formation. This resonates with the creative and formative aspects of the Dutch verb *scheppen,* which means, in its simplest term, to create or to scoop.[175] *-Schap*, in denoting entities or conditions that are a result of creation or shaping, aligns with the fundamental premise of *scheppen*: to bring forth or to give form to something. *Scheppen* has historical roots in Old Dutch, but over time its application has evolved.[176] Building off *scheppen*, analogous verbs circle around this notion of "to create": *maken* (to make); *smeden* (to forge); *produceren* (to produce); *creëren* (to create and or produce); *opscheppen* (to scoop up, to shovel).[177] In the context of *Landschap*, its suffix *-schap* suggests a condition or state of the land, such that the landscape is something shaped or created, connecting back to the verb *scheppen.*

Shaping and creating situates landscape as an active process in the production of human and land relations, and ideas and values manifest through the act of creation itself. British geographer Doreen Massey states that landscape is "a doing": always under construction, a process in motion that is never stable, a product of interrelations.[178] In this light, I abide by W.J.T. Mitchell who asserts that landscape is a verb.[179] *To landscape* means to create, shape, shovel, scrape, and scoop, not just in a physical sense, but ideologically, too, because this shaping of the land in turn effects what is seen and how it is seen. As land is inherent to the understanding of landscape, it becomes not just a thing to be gazed upon, but an active contributor to the understanding and formation of the world, because, as American art historian John Rohrbach notes, "seeing is the first step toward acting on what one sees."[180]

Landschap, entangled with its complex suffix, exemplifies how the Dutch created a self-image that reflected their valuation of land and its subsequent transformation in a nascent capitalist moment. Paintings from this period effectively foreshadow the development of logistics and its transformations of land into image, highlighting material reality over the symbolic or allegorical.[181] Jacob van Ruisdael's *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Grounds* is exemplary of this notion. As American art historian Ann Jensen Adams suggests, land for the Dutch was treated as a composition and naturalized through its framing as a picture which not only represented power, but produced it as well.[182] *Landschap*, then, is an image of economic processes: shaped by humans and specific economic activity and reliant on its visual portrayal to reinforce its official status. *Landschap* not only portrays physical spaces but is also wedded to economic processes, values, and systems that shape those sites. Updating *landschap's* economic history, with emphasis on its modern counterpart *-scheppen,* conveys ways in which human economic endeavours — such as the Port of Rotterdam's maritime infrastructure — create, scrape, make, and

173 Marlies Philippa and Frans Debrabandere, *Etymologisch Woordenboek van het Nederlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003).

174 "Etymologiebank," accessed February 4, 2024, http://www.etymologie.nl.

175 "Cooljugator" (website search results for the word *scheppen)*, accessed February 4, 2024, https://cooljugator.com/nl/scheppen.

176 "Etymologiebank."

177 "Cooljugator."

178 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005).

179 W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

180 John Rohrbach, "Introduction," in *Reframing the New Topographics*, ed. Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), xxv.

181 Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 119-168.

182 Ann Jensen Adams, "Competing Communities in the 'Great Bog of Europe,'" in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 35-76.

produce imprints on the land and our perception. As a landscape photographer, I am descendent from the Dutch landscape painters of the 17th century. *Landschap* is clearly an economic process that represents power and naturalizes those processes. In the Port of Rotterdam, it is not difficult to understand contemporary Dutch land use and how *landschap* actively produces Dutch society in its current image. Summon back to my journey onboard the *FutureLand* ferry described in Bureau Mission One, in which the ex-sea captain, who served as narrator and tour guide for my excursion, excitedly gestured towards the Maasvlakte container port, dramatically exclaiming that "...this *used* to be the North Sea!"

Land, once it is productive — as the ex-sea captain tour guide heartily pointed out — attains use value as a commodity (as a practical utility for productive purposes); simultaneously, exchange value arises from its capacity to facilitate economic activities, seen starkly in the Port of Rotterdam, where the land's transformation enhances its role in the distribution and circulation of goods. But *landschap*, as an image of economic processes, provides a second degree of exchange value: the view itself. W.J.T. Mitchell refers to this as "inexhaustible spiritual value."[183] The view holds significant value beyond visual appeal. For example, the Port of Rotterdam, through its representation, holds significant capital across cultural, economic, and social contexts within the Netherlands and abroad. Within the framework of an economic landscape, the view becomes more than just visual phenomena or artifact: it yields into a form of real estate, acquiring an inexhaustible supply of value.[184] The Port is not a simple image of a simple scene, but instead, through its formation as *landschap*, it is a complex signifier loaded with meanings that are negotiated and exchanged across various platforms and discourses, thereby influencing perceptions, decisions, and actions related to the Port and its broader implications. This transformation elevates the view from a simple purchasable picture, akin to a souvenir, to an asset that embodies symbolic, ideological, and financial worth.[185]

183 Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 15.

184 W. J. T. Mitchell asks: "But how many photographs, postcards, paintings, and awe-struck 'sightings' of the Grand Canyon will it take to exhaust its value as landscape?" See: Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 15.

185 Mitchell, The *Lie of the Land*, 2.

1.5 CONCLUSION

I started this Chapter with a cursory investigation into all of the derivatives that infiltrate the word "landscape". Such a vivisection demonstrates how economic land use and visual representation are entangled and inherent to the landscape idea, thereby grounding my landscape photographic practice within logistical contexts. Taking a detailed look into this specific word maintains focus when entering into a beguiling and complicated landscape such as the Port of Rotterdam. Moving forward, *landschap*, through etymological revelation, is more than a word, highlighting particular structures while also uncovering clear strategies. I invoked W.J.T. Mitchell's incitement to transform landscape into a verb, then took a further step by initiating *landschap* as an action to enter and comprehend logistical sites. This Chapter demonstrates that rooting into the complexities of landscape not only exposes its inherent ambiguities, but also reveals the potential of landscape, which is often hidden and obscured by the physical characteristics of the land itself.

With a solid foundation complete, the next chapter builds upon this etymological excursion of landscape's historical and cultural meanings. I introduce a conceptual tethering of "site and sight" to examine how a logistical landscape is a fusion between material base and symbolic representation. Scrutinizing the relation of site as physical space and sight as perceptual interpretation illustrates how these elements both shape — and are shaped by — the economic and operational frameworks of logistics. Site, I propose, is the material foundation upon which cultural and economic activities are grounded and observed, while its counterpart, sight, emphasizes the ways in which landscapes are framed, understood, and communicated within cultural and logistical contexts. By positioning landscape as a verb and practice, my aim is to open up new pathways and channels, suggesting that in order to grasp the logistical landscape, one must consider it as a confluence of physical space and a symbolic lens through which the world is perceived and contested. The forthcoming chapter advocates for a landscape that is practical and experiential, urging a sustained examination of how the Port influences, and is influenced by, the larger socio-economic structures of which it is a part.

CH 02

THE SITE OF LAND-SCAPE;

THE SIGHT OF LAND-SCAPE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, an etymological exploration into the word "landscape" revealed its connection to the material and the representational. I showed how landscape simultaneously claims multiple meanings that have morphed over time, dependent on context, geography, and various disciplinary and discursive interpretations. Its terminology, rich in ambiguity and full of complexity, never settles for a singular definition. Landscape's vitality exists in these inherent tensions and contradictions, underlined by its iterative capacity and generosity to whomever encounters the word. Now, using the scrutiny placed on landscape's etymological heritage, I move from the word itself and redefine landscape as a viable and active framework for my artistic practice. In this chapter, I introduce and unpack two pivotal concepts: site and sight. By site, I refer to physical space itself — the material environment where economic and cultural activities occur. Site encompasses the geographic features, built structures, and the visible aspects of human and logistical interactions with the land. Its partner, sight, pertains to the perceptual and interpretative aspects of landscape. This involves how physical spaces are viewed, understood, and potentially contested, particularly through the medium of photography in relation to the official narrative established by the Port Authority.

Landscape is a union of materiality and representation, not dissimilar to how a landscape photographer forms a coalition between reality and image.[186] The material landscape shows how various cultural formations of land use structures social relations of place, while landscape representation is not just a depiction of those relations, but also structures them ideologically. I will not argue for the primacy of one conception over the other. Instead, as a landscape photographer, I will show how it is necessary to bring these seemingly opposed views into contact with each other to adequately respond to the social and power relations that structures, for my purposes, logistical land use today. While I have already conducted landscape's etymological vivisection by scrutinizing its prefix, *land-*, and partner suffix *-scape*, in this chapter, I further expand upon their meaning and reconfigure these two poles as site and sight. I do not see this severance as binary opposition, but rather a productive alliance to comprehend the tensions and contestations that form a symbiotic relationship between land as a product of contemporary industrial and economic culture and its representation as an incontestable, fixed, or natural entity.[187]

While landscape is acknowledged concurrently as a picture or view that provides perspective on the world and as a portion of the earth's surface, its fluid and elusive nature elides attention, slipping in and out of focus. As a photographer — a landscape photographer — I use this chapter to stake a position within such instability to establish ground rules in order to seriously attend to the conditions and politics of land use and representation. I have no interest in fixing or locking down landscape's meaning as something incontrovertible. I begin the chapter by unfolding landscape from a particular discourse — cultural landscape studies — as an attempt to pro-

186 Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 29.

187 Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson, "Introduction: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Land Use," in *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, ed. Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 2.

visionally shape its ambiguous nature by focusing on its relation to site and sight. Once these conceptual parameters are established, I diverge from the strictures of cultural landscape studies and situate landscape within my own particular milieu: landscape photography.

2.2 LANDSCAPE, A SUITE OF THINGS

A physical understanding of landscape cannot be severed from its representation, nor the other way round; they are entangled. The morphology of land is what gives the representational, or ideological, its referent. Without it, landscape representation floats free, devoid of any connection to the physical which it relies on for its depiction.[188] In return, physical space is transformed into meaningful place. Positioned in such a way, it is impossible to see these two aspects — landscape-as-morphology and landscape-as-representation — as anything but dependent on each other.[189] That's because landscape is a material, physical entity that simultaneously functions as an ideological, image-based construction. Yet, this equation cannot be applied equally across all landscapes, which is why a caveat must be made for the specific site of my research: the logistical landscape. In his book *The Lie of the Land,* about migrant workers and the heavily industrialized agriculture of California's Inland Empire, American geographer Don Mitchell states that landscape is the product of both physical labour and representations of that labour. This representation, in turn, serves to normalize and harmonize the appropriation of labour while imposing a system of control and order within the landscape itself.[190] While it is not quite as simple as superimposing logistics over labour, Mitchell provides an opening for logistics, like labour, to not be treated as a neutral trace of physical industrial and economic activities, but as an ideological tool that constructs a logistical view, which shapes and asserts its perspective onto the world.[191]

The American geographer Carl O. Sauer declared in his 1924 essay "The Morphology of Landscape" that landscape is "a naively given section of reality."[192] While this could be presumed a naive position — landscape as an obedient object, waiting to be analyzed as a prefigured entity to extract meaning — his statement must be seen in relation to its epistemological cousin, the framing of that land as a view. The naively given aspects of land are as valid alongside the (re)-presentation of that land as a site to be consumed, digested, modified or even contested as, and for, sight.[193] Amalgamating *land* and *scape* with *site* and *sight* declares landscape an integral component of everyday life. Landscape is lived with every day while simultaneously experienced as an image, reflecting British geographer Doreen Massey's eloquence that landscape is a medium in flux, a "simultaneity of stories-so-far," where its meaning is up for constant negotiation and forms an integral part of cultural and social processes.[194] It is through landscape that the everyday may be interrupted, made better, or even destroyed. It is precisely because of this supposed normality of the everyday that I want to conceive of landscape as a practice, actively responding to a world that is often static and immobile, an incontestable entity.[195] Mitchell, who grasps landscape's elusive nature as it strives to condition our everyday surround-

188 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land.*

189 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land,* 9.

190 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land,* 28.

191 For slightly varied definitions of the logistical view, see: Charmaine Chua, "Container Stacking: Packing and Moving the World," *The Funambulist Magazine*, accessed February 7, 2024, https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/06-object-politics/container-stacking-packing-moving-world-charmaine-chua. And: Niccolò Cuppini, Mattia Frapporti, and Maurilio Pirone, "Logistics Struggles in the Po Valley Region: Territorial Transformations and Processes of Antagonistic Subjectivation," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no. 1 (2015): 119-134. And: Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

192 Carl O. Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 316.

193 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 15.

194 Doreen Massey, "Opening Propositions," in *For Space* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), 9.

195 George L. Henderson, "What (Else) We Talk about When We Talk about Landscape: For a Return to the Social Imagination," in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*, eds. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 178-198.

ings, extends the definition and says that landscape is a "suite of things": both built space and social process, summoned through the material and representational.[196] Out of this conflagration of contradictions and complexities, I position practice as a method of rearranging landscape not as a genre, but as an autonomous concept that is marked by human (and nonhuman) activity, be it physical, perceptual, or conceptual. Landscape's social and spatial aspects are heightened to destabilize logistical tendencies that naturalize such land formations into a static image.

In *The Lie of the Land,* Mitchell invokes John Steinbeck's Great Depression-era novel *The Grapes of Wrath* as an example to critique the American Dream as both a representation of Eden, and a horrid, acrid landscape of brutal labour practices. This Dream is at once a static and incontestable image naturalized into society. Steinbeck writes of the "Okie" Joad family, who, after arduous months in exodus from Oklahoma, finally reach California's San Joaquin Valley, and stop to gaze out over the supposed promised land where a startling vista awaits. He writes:

> They drove through Tehachapi in the morning glow, and the sun came up behind them, and then — suddenly they saw the great valley below them. [...] The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm houses. Pa sighed, "I never knowed they was anything like her." The peach trees and the walnut groves, and the dark green patches of oranges. And red roofs among the trees, and barns — rich barns. [...] He called, "Ma — come look. We're there!" [...]. The distance was thinned with haze, and the land grew softer and softer in the distance. A windmill flashed in the sun, and its turning blades were like a little heliograph, far away. Ruthie and Winfield looked at it, and Ruthie whispered, "It's California."[197]

Of course, the Joads come down and puncture that vista, only to be bitterly disappointed by its reality as they go on to experience anything but the American Dream. Mitchell, through Steinbeck's narrative, focuses on the disparity between the idyllic vision of America as an image, and the ugly reality that underpins it. He argues that this idealized picture ("an apt term")[198] obscures the harsh conditions of labour, land use, and inequality, and that the "American Apotheosis that is California can only ever be seen from afar."[199]

2.3 LANDSCAPE AS A PRACTICE

Don Mitchell imbues the landscape with great power, yet theorist of visual culture W.J.T. Mitchell considers it a "relatively weak power."[200] He does acknowledge, however, that even in spite of its weak status, landscape still exudes subtle, almost undetectable emotions over people that may be dif-

196 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 30.

197 John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking Press, 1939), 250-251.

198 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 8.

199 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 14.

200 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Preface to the Second Edition," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), vii.

ficult to identify. Partly, this is because landscape tends to be viewed not as something to be looked at, but rather overlooked.[201] In W.J.T. Mitchell's telling, landscape is founded in not paying attention to any particular feature, but instead in compressing all those peculiar and particular elements into a digestible vista or scene. Its sweeping vista is taken in (its "gestalt"),[202] but not necessarily the various things that combine to become the scene. Just as the Joads learned, the view holds promise and fortune, but only because it retains a distance, obscured by haze; the dream is but an image. We have withdrawn from really *looking* at the site, instead reducing landscape's character via distance which abrogates responsibility to the various conditions that have constructed that site in the first place.[203] Mitchell's point is that this kind of looking is nothing more than an invitation to look at...nothing.

201 Mitchell, "Preface," vii-viii.

202 Mitchell, "Preface," vii.

203 Scott and Swenson, *Critical Landscapes*, 2.

204 Mitchell, "Preface," 1.

I take seriously W.J.T. Mitchell's oft-recognized assertion that landscape should be understood not as a noun, but as a verb. Such a simple gesture recalibrates landscape as a process of social formation rather than inert observation. "It asks that we think of landscape, not as an object to be seen or a text to be read," Mitchell states, "but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed."[204] This was my point in Bureau Mission One: that passive observation only reinforces and stabilizes the official narrative of the Port. This is also reinforced in my research question, particularly in my claim for legibility. Landscape, activated as a verb, functions as a complex of political, social and economic processes and practices in both the physical and represented environment. Landscape, functioning like a transferium, may now act as a discourse and organizing platform in order to sense the various actors within logistical sites. Such an arrangement helps me to construct a practice not solely for the creation of artistic objects. Rather, *to landscape as practice* so as to carry out meaningful relationships of both the real and imagined environment: as an artist and a citizen. This is what Chapters 4 and 5 particularly emphasize. There, I focus on developing a framework that collaborates with landscape to open up possibilities for reimagining and reshaping the Port in ways that are reflective of everyday experience, rather than of its official, bureaucratic presentation. In other words, attending to landscape and its attachment to my chosen method of cultural production — landscape photography — easily prompts that it is not enough to just look at the world, but that I must try and come closer to understanding our place in the world.

2.4 THE PARADOXES OF LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

In my view, site and sight is vital to a revised landscape photography. With "landscape" now activated as a verb, I envision a practice of attentiveness that begs for a relationship to the built environment in order to make sense of what is at stake socially. As a (former) citizen of Rotterdam and proximate neighbour to the Port, it is my desire to share in the social responsibility of the environment in which I live, and yet, through my practice I realize that it is also the site itself that shapes my relationship to the environment. The danger is to become lost in the social construction of space, echoing American geographer Margaret FitzSimmons's caution to not forget about the "mat-

ter of nature."[205] She believed attention to the physical world was perishing in favour of the ideological conception of landscape as an object for display and visual consumption, obstructing from view the "brute reality" that proves crucial to land's creation through labor and production.[206] *landscape as practice* considers the social and spatial, identifying relations of power that course through each. FitzSimmons's concern indicates how landscape has been resoundingly theorized as an ideological construction, hiding from necessary attention the very complex, and often brutal, machinations that it took to construct that very site.[207]

In Bureau Mission One, I shared how photographer and theorist Allan Sekula considered photography constrained by its indexical relationship to the visible, struggling to disclose much of what occurs beyond sight, let alone divulging the complex layers of economic, political, and cultural forces captured within (logistical) landscapes.[208] This raises serious doubts about the medium's fixation on surface appearances and its capacity to engage meaningfully with underlying systems that shape the world. However, Sekula's *Fish Story* does offer a compelling counterpoint to this perceived constraint, testifying to the medium's potential to pierce such visibility and disclose hidden narratives of maritime globalization and its impact on labour and landscapes. I introduce Sekula's *Fish Story* at a later moment in this chapter, arguing that his book does indeed surpass photography's supposedly superficial gaze to address the complex interconnections between sea, commerce, and the flow of capital.

As a landscape photographer, I am implicated in the construction of landscape as a view that demands visual appreciation.[209] And yet, the artistic research produced herein reveals there's more to landscape photography than producing singular moments for appreciation. What I am searching for is an inter-relation between the pursuit of looking and appreciating with other forms of activity and being. The implication is that artistic engagement is clearly tied into other concerns. J.B. Jackson noted that: "We are *not* spectators; the human landscape is *not* a work of art. It is the temporary product of much sweat and hardship and earnest thought."[210] To landscape as a practice, then, is an attempt at unveiling, or even seeking out root causes of what the site withholds and discloses, why it may be, and in what ways it transforms us. Can landscape as practice produce social change? Partly, I see the necessity of abandoning the spectator stance that privileges the anthropocentric view in favour of a biocentric way, to act "as a *part* of the represented environment rather than as an idealized viewing subject standing *apart from* the represented environment."[211] *To landscape*, as I frame it, means photography is an embedded relation, and an experience, with the scene itself. Chapters 5 and 6 outline such a maneuver in more detail as both theoretical and practical, while the concluding Bureau Mission Three specifies some examples of how I have brought experience via photographic practice to the landscape. There I argue that my landscape photography practice enacts disclosure when it involves more than just pictorial representation and is instead put into action.

To landscape, though, is a nebulous term. For example, recall from Chapter 1 how landscape is an accumulated experience that is both felt and lived, a registration of everyday life, but that it also functions across various degrees

205 Margaret FitzSimmons, "The Matter of Nature," *Antipode* 21, no. 2 (1989): 106-20.

206 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 4.

207 Central to this idea of landscape as purely ideological, see: J. Duncan and N. Duncan, "(Re)Reading the Landscape," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6 (1988): 117-126. See also: Peter Jackson, "The Idea of Culture: A Response to Don Mitchell," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21, no. 3 (1996): 572-573. And: Denis Cosgrove, "Ideas and Culture: A Response to Don Mitchell," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21, no. 3 (1996): 574-575. And: James Duncan and Nancy Duncan, "Reconceptualizing the Idea of Culture in Geography: A Reply to Don Mitchell," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* New Series 21, no. 3 (1996): 576-579.

208 Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (London: MACK, 2016), 64.

209 Greg Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere: New Topographics and Art of the 1970s" in *Reframing the New Topographics* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), 58-59.

210 J.B. Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (Yale University Press, 1997), 343. Emphasis in the original.

211 Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 59. Emphasis in the original.

of literary and visual modes as, and for, sight. In a logistical landscape, lines of trade and architectural configurations exist in a more-than-physical state making the site dissoluble. Tangible infrastructures support the material movement of goods and visibly reshape the landscape, while less visible, yet pervasive, actions such as surveillance and other control mechanisms operate beyond sight. Italian photography curator Marta Dahó draws upon the photographic allegory of "out of focus" to suggest that certain elements have the potential to become visible if only the right amount of attention can be paid towards the act of focus.[212] As such, photography itself is laden with potential to attain focus. What is needed, then, is a set of practices and guidelines to enact such clarity.

2.5 "A RICH AND BEAUTIFUL BOOK"

Carl Sauer propositioned a straightforward and helpful notion of landscape understanding when he conflated "land(scape) and life."[213] Land is (our) life: what is on the land, its cultural accumulation on the earth's surface, is a record of who, and what, we are. Sauer's statement asserts that what's visible is what matters most to comprehend our relations to the everyday, today. But, recall that Sauer did say landscape is a *naively* given section of reality. Emphasis on the naive (his, too). This morphological reading should only be a start, as it implies that the visible is all we need to consider; however, in a logistical landscape, comprised of vast scale and distance, is the visible enough? I have not been convinced. That said, a symbolic reordering as pure view is also potentially misleading as it reduces landscape to a text waiting to be read: all signs and symbols are clearly positioned, curtailing landscape to only an epistemological enterprise, evacuating its physical referent and responsibility. Echoing Don Mitchell's critical evaluation of the California Dream, knowledge gleaned from the symbolic (or representational) landscape is contained in the picture (or text), waiting to be deciphered.[214] Considering Sauer's naively given morphological concept on the one hand with its symbolic mirror on the other, I am not so sure either concept, independently, is up to the job of trying to comprehend today's logistical landscape.

J.B. Jackson, following Sauer, remarked that we need to familiarize ourselves with the landscape, regardless of its type. For him, landscape was more than just a view, it was a way to live a more meaningful and engaged life with the environment. It is just a "matter of learning how to see."[215] For Jackson, comprehension is rooted at the scale of the personal, yet achieving such awareness necessitates one to learn the landscape as a form of literacy: a code to life. In the introductory essay of his magazine *Landscape,* Jackson first formulated this idea of learning to see landscape by writing: "Wherever we go, whatever the nature of our work, we adorn the face of the earth with a living design which changes and is eventually replaced by that of a future generation.... A rich and beautiful book is always open before us. *We have but to learn to read it.*"[216] A wonderful notion. By understanding the various machinations that occur in the world and learning to follow the cues laid out for us on the land, we may very well discover that esteemed and

212 Marta Dahó, "Landscape and the Geographical Turn in Photographic Practice," *Photographies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 227-248.

213 Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," 316.

214 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 14.

215 Robert Calo, "J.B. Jackson and the Love of Everyday Places," YouTube video, 57:58, accessed September 30, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nc97DTDbc3U.

216 J.B. Jackson, "The Need to Be Versed in Country Things," *Landscape* 1, 1 (1951): 4-5. Emphasis in the original.

reciprocal relation to the environment that Jackson hoped for. This mirrors my itch — to enable others to come a little bit closer to the landscapes of the everyday (insomuch that the logistical is the everyday, though a version that emanates from the corporate and the powerful) to recognize and disclose these systems that determine collective space.[217] If only it was as simple as that! However, I have to start somewhere.

Jackson argues that landscape is a document ("the beautiful book is always open before us") and can tell a story, and that all one has to do is learn how to read. Special skills and a vocabulary are necessary.[218] However, this argument depends on landscape being straightforward, reduced to its topography and appearances. But, as British geographer Stephen Daniels has forcefully written, landscape is often quite duplicitous, working to hide the consequences and connections of power from visibility.[219] Following Daniels, a follow up question to this analogy of a landscape that can easily be read if one has acquired the proper skills and vocabulary is to ask: *who* has actually written this "book"? Because what if this "book," like my site of research the Port of Rotterdam, is an "official landscape?"[220] As I wrote in Bureau Mission One on bureaucratic vision, such status ensures that these landscapes remain obscured, hidden by their ties to power and access, and thus they evade external scrutiny and visibility. I am not convinced that Jackson's statement, regardless of its eloquence, functions for my purposes as the assumption is that this "book" is accessible and readable with newfound skills of literacy. Yet as the site of my research proves, the official landscape and its after-effect of bureaucratic vision instigates a much more complex "book" to be read — if it can be read at all.

Sauer reinforces this proposition when he writes in *The Education of a Geographer* that "geography is a science of observation [...] The geographic best [for students] rests on seeing and thinking about what is in the landscape [...] in some manner[;] the field of geography is always a reading of the face of the earth." A nice sentiment, but it is predicated on the condition of landscape functioning as a noun, static and immobile (and, usually, nostalgic and rural). By altering landscape into a verb, I have begun to recast it as a dynamic process and practice, cancelling its singular status as a "book," and instead turning it into a compendium of all kinds of "books." To carry the analogy further, some of these "books" are clearly legible, while others — probably most — are not. The varied "books" rise and fall across a spectrum of visibility; some might even remain hidden and obscured, requiring a real commitment to deciphering them. It's been argued by the American geographer Pierce Lewis that landscapes are repositories of history, an accumulation and erasure of what was once there, either completely gone or partially visible, or totally reconfigured in the service of other needs.[221] In this view, landscape is never complete; instead, it is always in process, echoing the spatial as "a practice, a doing, an event, a becoming — a material and social reality forever (re)created in the moment,"[222] evidence of Doreen Massey's sentiment of "stories-so-far." Landscapes — especially logistical and other official landscapes — are more than the sum of their surface, because what is not in view is probably more important than what is. These types of landscapes, like the Port of Rotterdam, serve as enforcers to economic ideologies, where unseen elements — such as underlying economic prerogatives, or labour and power relations, for example — prove more criti-

217 Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

218 Pierce Lewis, "The Monument and the Bungalow," in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J. B. Jackson*, eds. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 85-108.

219 Stephen Daniels, "Marxism, Culture, and the Duplicity of Landscape," in *New Models in Geography* (London: Routledge, 1989), 196-220.

220 Paul Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1-21.

221 Lewis, "The Monument and the Bungalow," 89.

222 Rob Kitchin, "Space," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, vol. 10, ed. R. Kitchin and N. Thrift (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009), 272.

cal than their visible assets.[223] This is why Jackson's and Sauer's declaration of reading the landscape as a "book" or as a series of morphological artifacts urges an inquiry into more than physical appearances to understand the various forces that moulds such landscapes.

I am not throwing away Jackson's nor Sauer's instruction. In fact, Jackson noted that more than looking (reading) is necessary. The American geographer Donald Meining, who, in writing about Jackson's apparent rejection of merely looking as the fundamental component in landscape appreciation, said that "landscape must be regarded first of all in terms of living rather than looking."[224] French philosopher of space Henri Lefebvre also articulated that landscapes are made not "in order to be read and grasped, but rather to be *lived* by people with bodies and lives in their own particular [...] context."[225] So, reading is a condition of landscape comprehension, yet its complexity can only be palpable when attached to lived experience. Photography performs quite well in this milieu as it has the capacity to be processual and to acknowledge systems rather than be reduced solely to formal responses.[226]

While Sauer and Jackson key into the necessity of the topography and surface of a site and how this can be read (with limitations), such insight also acknowledges that not everything is visible or able to be read and deciphered neatly. There will always be a certain form of incompleteness in any landscape, and this is certainly true of the logistical landscape which is only ever partial and discrete. While I pay particular attention to this partiality, it is not just what can and cannot be seen that is valid in evaluating and comprehending such landscapes. Just because something is viewable (or not) does not necessarily mean that it is knowable (or legible). So, while the sight of a logistical site is a prime aspect of my research, I also acknowledge that visibility can be conceptualized in other less obvious ways. However, landscapes *are* read; there is no denying. We do so every day, consciously and unconsciously. We do not simply navigate the various forms and structures that form the landscape, but we read them in order to make sense of the space. According to Don Mitchell, this "is part of the process of transforming spatiality into landscape. Landscapes, and landscape representations, are therefore very much a product of social struggle, whether engaged over form or over how to grasp and read that form."[227] In other words, one must constantly fluctuate between landscape-as-morphology and landscape-as-representation. This entanglement of reading/looking and doing probes into the degrees of visibility, provoking one to ask what's there, why it's there, and how these landscapes function. Acknowledging both the site and sight of a logistical landscape starts to expand out from its bureaucratic form to offer a glimpse of visibility that, while not fully illuminated, at least inches closer to the machinations of that site through sight.

2.6 CONTESTING THE (OFFICIAL) LANDSCAPE

So far, I have articulated landscape as a dynamic, fluid process, in both its terminology and actual function. It is not necessarily a unitary thing, stable

223 Zukin, *Landscapes of Power*.

224 Donald Meinig, "Reading the Landscape: An Appreciation of W. G. Hoskins and J. B. Jackson," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Donald Meinig (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 236.

225 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 143.

226 Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 64.

227 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 29.

and fixed, but instead offers prospects for multiple trajectories to unfold simultaneously, in opposition to the singular and inevitable.[228] And yet, an official landscape like the Port of Rotterdam fixes its very status as a naturalized, total entity — a thing that just "is," incontestable and unambiguous.[229] For example, the interpretation centre run by the Port Authority is called *FutureLand*; its very name implying that the future is already predicted, rendering whatever beliefs it proclaims to have as an inevitable outcome. To define the "official landscape," I stick with J.B. Jackson's characterization in which he claims that these are spaces sanctioned and designed by formal authorities embodying its societal ideals and power formations.[230] The Port of Rotterdam is an exemplary official landscape, conforming to logistical processes while also reflecting its institutional values and cultural ideals. Certain circumstances, such as zoning laws, environmental effluvia, accessibility, and bureaucratic and other administrative restrictions, all imperil the possibility of having meaningful relationships with what lay hidden and obscured by chain link fencing. Knowledge of an official landscape is skewed towards what is chosen or made available for notice, rather than what is actually there. These kinds of landscapes present a dual struggle in perception: their innate tendency to remain hidden beyond sight and out of view is coupled with a conceptual struggle to comprehend them across a scale that slides from dynamic and always in process to static and natural. This contradiction reflects my struggle working within logistical landscapes on how to engage with and interpret these landscapes, oscillating between recognizing their fluidity and recognizing them as fixed.

Don Mitchell and Allan Sekula, in their differing methods and disciplines, both offer propositions on how to contest official landscapes. Mitchell frames his understanding of the industrialized agricultural landscape as "brute reality," while Sekula, in relation to *Fish Story*, refers to the "grimy present moment" of the maritime world to critique global economic and labour conditions.[231] Mitchell argues that much of the contemporary landscape has been *made* — not just as a work of the imagination, but literally constructed through the brute force of labourers: "steelworkers, pavers, chip assemblers, dam builders, drywall nailers, textile workers, and, quite importantly, army upon army of migratory workers planting crops, repairing railroads and highways, chopping down trees, mixing cement, and harvesting cantaloupes."[232] Yet, landscape is also an image — a picture. And as a picture, it can only be seen and admired from afar. This distance, as Don Mitchell argues, is crucial in understanding how landscape remains entrenched in sight as incontestable. He positions the relationship between the produced form and the representation of the California landscape by centring the role of labour that creates a "brute reality."[234] Mitchell's notion is a generative concept allowing for nuanced understanding of landscapes created through economic and industrial processes, conflating site and sight into a usable whole. Sekula, I propose, would not disagree. The "grimy present moment" is within a broader methodological pursuit deployed by Sekula, what he described as critical realism, an approach that emphasizes the underlying structures that generate observable phenomena. For Sekula, this meant sustained attention to surface appearances to reveal the contradictions of the visible and often-invisible effects of capitalism on individuals and communities captured within global maritime infrastructures.[235] Mitchell and Sekula bring each of the dichotomies and paradoxes of site and sight into productive alignment.

228 Massey, *For Space*, (London: SAGE Publications, 2005).

229 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 30.

230 Groth, "Frameworks," 19.

231 On Mitchell's "brute reality," see: Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 4. For Sekula's "grimy present moment," see: Edward Dimendberg, "Interview with Allan Sekula," *Bomb Magazine*, July 1, 2005, accessed February 2022, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2005/07/01/allan-sekula/.

232 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 1.

234 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 9.

228 Hilde Van Gelder and Jan Baetens, eds., *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art: Around Allan Sekula's Photography* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006).

Landscape is not just an image to be admired, but instead, each of them tether representation to an actual, physical reality that was made under brutal circumstances. In other words, to really come to terms with a logistical site, one must open up the view and show how it is constructed.[236]

The notion of violence embedded within the landscape is what Mitchell's *The Lie of the Land* and Sekula's *Fish Story* each intensely focus on: unattainable Dreams that in reality are brutal and grimy constructions and a byproduct of the economic system, with the landscape acting as mediator. This holds fruitful tension for my own practice. The tension of pleasure in appreciating the view (and its representation) is directly connected to the physical conditions that shaped and formed the site. Interlocking are various forces of economics that do not just generate the official (logistical) landscape but also entomb us within the "grimy present moment" as a reminder of the individual's place within these structures. In other words, landscape can be understood as an interconnected relationship between view and production: landscape imagery and landscape reality. Concentrating only on landscape imagery often leads to its portrayal as fixed and naturalized, reduced to an image that occludes from sight any visible — or invisible — reality. And when reality disappears, power secures itself as an adjunct, or replacement, for the actual conditions of the site.

Swirling around these considerations is my own role as a landscape photographer in the Port of Rotterdam. My doubts are contributing to this naturalizing — or stabilizing — aspect of landscape. Recall in Bureau Mission One where I discussed a particular photograph of mine from October 31, 2020, and how I considered it as simply mirroring the official view, producing what Sekula calls a commodity, "an object of connoisseurship."[237] My intention is to do the opposite: to assist in the destabilization of landscape and not to fix it into any one form or image. Outside of my own practice, I offer an example from the Canadian landscape photographer Ed Burtynsky's series *Oil*.[238] His photographs are spectacular renditions of socio-technical apparatuses, such as the immense scale of oil from its production to its consumption — visualizing from extraction sites to refinement processes and automobile infrastructures [Fig.12]. These photographs are huge, large-scale pictures printed and framed to relinquish in stark detail industrial landscapes and the impact of human activity on the earth's surface. Whenever I see a Burtynsky photograph, especially as framed objects, I am perpetually in awe; they really are works of wonder of both craft and the enormity of such devastating power that grinds itself onto the earth. On the one hand, I agree with Canadian media studies and petrocultures scholar Michael Truscello's assessment that Burtynsky's photographs "frame as an invitation to contemplate the many associations beyond the frame; in the case of his photographs about oil, the pipelines, wells, and refineries represent passages, associations, transfers of energy beyond the frame."[239] And yet... And yet, landscape is ideological. Through its representation, relations of power are able to seize upon these depictions and fix themselves as if in aspic, producing an incontestable site. For me, Burtynsky's photographs don't (quite) attest to Mitchell's brute reality nor Sekula's grimy present moment, and this is always in the back of mind when I am producing my own photography — that a landscape photograph, conventionally, presents the landscape as "a singular, unchanging, framed, and, therefore, 'pictorialized'

236 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 14. On this notion, see also: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972); John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, "Introduction: Iconography and Landscape," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments*, eds. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-10.

237 Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism," 60.

238 Edward Burtynsky, *Burtynsky - Oil*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Steidl, 2014).

239 Michael Truscello, *Infrastructural Brutalism: Art and the Necropolitics of Infrastructure* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020), 166.

[Fig.12]

view of the scene that establishes clear boundaries between art and life, treating the landscape as the former rather than the latter."[240] While Burtynsky's photographs, particularly *Oil*, do scratch at presenting the hidden infrastructures of oil production and consumption, I am left questioning and ambivalent towards these systems. It provides me an admonition for my own practice: I must query into how that land got that way.[241] This sentiment of *how* is echoed by American political geographer Richard Walker, who also triggers alarms that (here he was speaking to cultural geographers, but this can also extend to a landscape photographer like me): [we are] "altogether too evasive about systematic forces of political economy in mainstream capitalist America and in answering the question of who and what, in fact, create urban and rural environments."[242] The underlying fear I have is to produce photographs that render the logistical landscape incontestable. If I do not navigate a route away, I imagine my practice will be rendered inert and useless, capitulating to official forces.

I am a landscape photographer because I love to look at, contemplate, and be in various kinds of landscapes — my opening anecdote in the Introduction is testament to this desire. And it is not just looking at or contemplating these landscapes but also becoming closer to understanding how they form. As American sociologist Sharon Zukin — in the context of capitalism and globalization — addresses in her book *Landscapes of Power*, official landscapes, when only considered on functional or visual merits, erase their significant power and cultural dynamics, mystifying urban and industrial space as docile, "weakening, reshaping, and displacing the view from the vernacular."[243] This knowledge forces two questions: am I replicating logistical landscapes as fixed representations, reflecting how, for example, the Port Authority created that land in the first place? And, if I am mirroring what's there through depiction and representation, than how can my landscape photographs challenge this conception of official land use? To start, W.J.T. Mitchell proposes there is a difference between an idealized view and something that produces an epistemological relationship, what he terms the "overlooked" as opposed to the "looked at."[244] He calls out to not flatten the landscape into an easily deducible whole, where distinct pieces and "things" get lost and smoothed in favour of the view, vista, or scene. This type of distance creates nothing more than, at best, a view of place. The "looked at," Mitchell proposes, involves a more sustained, profound form of seeing that may indeed produce a heightened relationship to the site.[245] I bring this up because I am a landscape photographer, and photography has an inherent appreciation for looking — and not just looking at the final picture. Additionally, as a photographer, I am in constant negotiation with the view in order to best produce a photograph. Returning back to Mitchell and Sekula — and also to Bureau Mission One — brute reality and the grimy present moment keep me focused on the entangled relations between site and sight, a reminder that logistical landscapes are sites of power producing a new kind of (bureaucratic) sight.

Landscape, as Mitchell, Jackson, and Sekula all clearly remind, is work. As work, someone had to have made it. And yet, what happens in the production of landscape as a view is the erasure of said labour from the image of its own creation. Sekula dedicated much of his creative and scholarly life to looking at the erasure of labour from representation, via words and photo-

240 Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 58.

241 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 18.

242 Richard Walker, "Unseen and Disbelieved: A Political Economist among Cultural Geographers," in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, eds. Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 165.

243 Zukin, *Landscapes of Power*, 15.

244 Mitchell, "Preface," vii-viii.

245 Mitchell, "Preface," vii-viii.

graphs.[246] His main critique can be pithily summed upped in an exchange with American photographer Lewis Baltz, who famously quipped, in relation to his 1974 set of photographs of anonymous warehouses published as *The New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California* that: "you don't know if they're manufacturing pantyhose or megadeath in there."[247] Sekula deemed such photography of depopulated homogeneity presented without comment as evacuating any social and labour referent. Dismissal of (at the time) new spatial phenomena manifested by capital's logic for such oxymoronically named "industrial parks," was, to Sekula, nothing more than complicity with the "mystifying translation of a site of production into a site of imaginary leisure."[248] Such photographs were, for Sekula, a bad abstraction, the "neutron bomb school of photography: killing people but leaving the real estate standing."[249] He posited that what we need is not a topography of abstraction but "a kind of political geography, a way of talking with words and images about both the system and our lives within the system."[250] The erasure — or sanitization — of the labour that built these landscapes allows them to thrive as incontestable, naturalized, and inevitable. Sticking to landscape only as a view effects no understanding of "the damned" (referring to the labourers) who are an integral part of providing beauty.[251]

2.7 THE SITE OF LANDSCAPE

In some quarters of the geographic discipline, it is a common belief that visible surfaces of the landscape may reveal clues to our culture as a fashioned byproduct of nature. One individual who believed this is the aforementioned Pierce Lewis, whose notion that the "human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our states, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears in tangible, visible form," has been seemingly reproduced as much as the McDonald's hamburger.[252] For Lewis, landscape is a mirror that reflects back at us, indicating who and how we are, and this is made possible through visible surfaces. This thinking is not dissimilar to Sauer's, who positioned landscape as a method for understanding the world and for assigning cultural meaning and value to it.[253] Sauer's project was the cultural landscape, an exploration into human-made processes that worked to shape the natural environment resulting in the visible world that surrounds us on an everyday basis. With enough patience and scrutiny, a geographer — or anyone, for that matter, even a landscape photographer — can detect the various processes of human activity that went into shaping the visible landscape. For Sauer, the landscape was the sum of its visible morphological components, a completely transparent entity waiting to be read and assessed, reinforcing his point that landscape is a "naively given" aspect: a visible surface awaiting interpretation.[254] Interpretation can then be used to decipher clues to uncover an understanding of the past and present cultures that made such lands: the needs, desires, and developments of society are thus divined. Landscape is not an ideological reference, but a morphological construction that pays astute attention to its surfaces. This claim is similar to that held by Sauer's compatriot J.B. Jackson, who further elaborated on the morphological aspects of landscape as a means of deriving and deciphering culture. Jackson situated landscape as a faithful regis-

246 For a thorough overview, Sekula's significant writings on this subject can be found in: Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (London: MACK, 2016)

247 Lewis Baltz, *The New Industrial Parks near Irvine, California* (New York: Castelli Graphics, 1974). Baltz's quote: Barry Schwabsky, "An influential photographer depicts the deadpan allure of postindustrial landscapes," *Bookforum Magazine*, accessed February 11, 2024, https://www.bookforum.com/print/1805/an-influential-photographer-depicts-the-deadpan-allure-of-postindustrial-landscapes-8886.

248 Allan Sekula, "School is a Factory," in *Photography Against the Grain, Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (London: MACK, 2016), 234.

249 Alberto Toscano, "Photography Against the Flow: Abstraction and Logistics in Allan Sekula's Writings," in *Allan Sekula Ship of Fools / The Dockers' Museum*, ed. Hilde van der Gelder (Leuven: University of Leuven Press, 2015), 51.

250 Sekula, "School is a Factory," 234.

251 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 20.

252 Pierce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides for Reading the American Scene," in *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. Donald W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 12.

253 Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," 315-350.

254 Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," 315-350.

ter that indexes the operations of human endeavour and presence. He said that "landscape is history made visible," and, separately, that landscape is "a portion of the earth's surface that can be comprehended at a glance."[255] Jackson did progress Sauer's morphological intent further. For him it wasn't about a calculation of culture as expressed by the earth's surface, but that landscape is grounded in life, and that in order to live a fulfilling life, one must not retreat but submit to a total and utter commitment to what the surface of earth may afford us. In this view, landscape is a faithful recorder of human activity solely through visibility. For Sauer and Jackson, landscape is not merely a gaze or even a way of seeing, but it is a material entity that must be assessed solely through physical presence: landscape-as-morphology.

There are some concerns I have with a naively given position, namely in the presumption that in the clearly visible, all can reveal itself. I have learned in and through my practice that visible surfaces of landscape do provide some kind of epistemological revelation, yet this does not go far enough. However, I want to lay out a few key moments in this argument that centralizes topographical concern before I elaborate on its shortcomings. Topography, as the acclaimed American urbanist Kevin Lynch notes, reinforces how we engage with the varied spaces and places that we inhabit and that inhabit us.[256] As I previously demonstrated, *land-* plays an integral part of landscape formation and understanding, as much as its partner *-scape*. Focusing on landscape's prefix implies a grounding with real places and real situations. As such, topography reveals our cultural past and present as well as indicates our possible futures. Such topographical concentration generates further explorations. In the Port of Rotterdam, immediately a spectacular sight presents itself, which leads me to inquire further into its physical conditions: What is this site, and why does it look that way? What forces went into its making, and how does it work? Why here? These first questions prove Sauer and Jackson right: paying attention to earth's visible surfaces generates a more complex relationship with any visibly present conditions. Topographical consideration is simply an opportunity to reveal more about how the world works. It's not a truth claim — as in, "this is the only way of interpreting the landscape" — but it does pose an opening into knowing more. Introduction to a logistical landscape is not only about the particular structural characteristics of its topography, but it is also about how the social, cultural, economic, political, and personal experiences shape common contemporary understanding of humanity, offering a structured approach to probe into our surroundings.[257]

However, there is more to the landscape than just what its surface may presume. While conviction that (human) inscriptions of land may indeed offer clues into our culture and values, I do not follow that each landscape may be read adequately in the same manner with the same tools of interpretation. Because landscapes are cultural products and shape culture, then each landscape is indicative of society's diverse set of values, implying they must be read in very different ways, affording a richness of evaluation and interpretation. There is no prescriptive rule; each landscape is embedded with its own social and cultural histories. It is impossible to presume that sets of landscapes can be read in a simultaneously cohesive manner. The British geographer Denis Cosgrove echoes this sentiment, stating that even a singular landscape — for example, a shopping mall frequented by himself

255 On the former, see: J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). See also: Jackson, *Landscape in Sight*, x. And on the latter, see: J.B. Jackson, "The Word Itself," in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 8.

256 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1960), 110.

257 Timothy Davis, "Looking Down the Road: J.B. Jackson and the American Highway Landscape," in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*, eds. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 80.

and his family — may be interpreted in multiple ways because each site is used in different ways by different people. In fact, as Cosgrove points out, at times it is not only a question of who is doing the interpreting, but it is also a question of exclusion: some groups of people (in his example, youth) may not have the opportunity for participation. Cosgrove's shopping centre is "a highly textured place, with multiple layers of meaning [...,] a symbolic place where a number of clues meet and perhaps clash."[258] This illustrates how a single site can yield multiple interpretations; visibility doesn't guarantee uniform interpretations. Cosgrove's conviction does not preclude a morphological understanding of landscape as a wasted proposition. Far from it. What it does offer is attention to the particularities of a given site, careful not to homogenize *an* experience as *the* experience.

In my own practice, I actively seek out and embrace such contradictions, accepting the responsibility that any reading I produce is mine and nobody else's. Even Pierce Lewis, he of the much-quoted position that landscape is our unwitting biography, also cautions that even though the landscape is a "document" that can be "read," it is still a document to be read by multiple readers with different cultural expectations and practices.[259] Lewis states that the human landscape as a complex document is a "cosmic understatement, and that in any landscape, a variety of readings is not only possible, but inevitable and even necessary."[260]

Going back to Sauer's morphological landscape as a mode of study to understand human culture and behaviour, the overt meaning of "a naively given section of reality"[261] is that the surface of the earth is the result of human activity and that material evidence is laid out before the interpreter as a specimen, not dissimilar to a sample thrust under a microscope. Considered in this way, the landscape is a compilation of various facts and figures, empirical data to be crunched, processed, and overhauled into a viable description of human culture. Perhaps a tad hyperbolic, but it does express some of the reticence I have with a focus on purely visible surfaces, even if, following Cosgrove and Lewis, we know that each surface will be read in wildly different ways depending on the reader. The focus on the morphological — even the word itself has a certain scientific distinction behind it — omits any kind of responsibility or engagement with land outside social and cultural processes; the landscape, in this formation, is an inert, even neutral, object, awaiting human interpretation. However, some slight adjustment suited to the social and cultural particularities of an official landscape ensures the Port of Rotterdam is not just the result of human activity but a material thing and a framing of the world.[262]

2.8 A FISH STORY

Before I move on to the conflation of a site and its view, I want to argue for a deeper relation with landscape's morphological aspect but framed in a slightly different way that adequately responds to the official landscape's obscured and invisible processes. At issue is that a solely morphological interpretation ignores landscape's duplicitous nature, often shaped by sig-

258 Denis Cosgrove, "Geography Is Everywhere: Culture and Symbolism in Human Landscapes," in *Horizons in Human Geography*, eds. Derek Gregory and Rex Walford (London: Palgrave, 1989), 119.

259 Lewis, "The Monument and the Bungalow," 88-89.

260 Lewis, "The Monument and the Bungalow," 88.

261 Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," 316.

262 Richard H. Schein, "Normative Dimensions of Landscape," in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*, eds. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003),199-218.

nificant forces like public–private consortiums and economic interests that reflect the ideals of these actors while concealing from view the labour and social forces that went into its construction. Viewed through a lens of invisible processes, it is possible to (paradoxically) "see" that the morphological approach of Sauer isn't quite up to the task. Perhaps Sauer was right in that the landscape is a naively given section of reality, obvious and transparent, but attention paid to the invisible operations beyond sight shows landscape as an active player in human affairs and not just a reflection of those affairs. This, as I have argued, is the terrain of people like Sekula and Don Mitchell, who vociferously argued that surfaces can be contested, if only we look beyond the visible. It is not possible to take the landscape at face value as this presumes a degree of trust implicit in the visible and tangible. Photographically, Sekula addresses this strange dimension between the documentary aspect of photography as a witness to the visible world and its limitations and biases, particularly how images, like photographs, simultaneously represent and obscure the complexities of maritime labour and globalization. Sekula strikes a careful balance between depicting visible realities and attempting to uncover underlying structures that shape those realities, emphasizing how the photograph is both interpretive and constructed.

Sekula was convinced that surfaces and visible infrastructures could unveil underlying conditions through the abundance of information they present. Having grown up in the port district of San Pedro in Southern California, he brought this inherited "stubborn materiality" to the fore with his publication *Fish Story*, "seizing upon the visual and visible signs of those processes inherent to the flow of goods, and made palpable by the dirt and grime, sweat and rust – the thick oily mess of capital."[263] I have previously written about *Fish Story* showcasing a small survey of photographs, which bears repeating here: a crumpled and oil-soaked uniform discarded on the deck of a ship; "a golf course reserved for visiting ship owners at a Hyundai shipyard in South Korea; a monument to the defenders of Veracruz, Mexico; the ocean terminal of Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong; unemployed Polish shipworkers; a sailor phoning his wife from the Port of Rotterdam."[264] For Sekula, the photograph is an essential tool to document the reality of the sea — a space shaped by geopolitical and economic forces — due to its unavoidable "social referentiality, its way of describing—albeit in enigmatic, misleading, reductive and superficial terms — a world of social institutions, gestures, manners, relationships" to make legible the intense conflict between capital and labour.[265] Indexicality, Sekula shows, is vital as it forces one to confront the world as it is, while simultaneously being able to reframe our imagination through representation ensuring human labour emerges from the shadows of containerization, not forgotten nor erased.

Take two sequential photographs in *Fish Story* that illustrate this idea [Fig.13]. In the first photograph, placed on the left page in the book's first chapter (itself titled "Fish Story"):

263 Donald Weber, "Dirty Pictures: Rupturing the Common Picture of Globalisation," *Trigger*, no. 2 (2020): 47.

264 Weber, "Dirty Pictures," 47.

265 Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (London: MACK, 2018), xi.

[Fig.13]

A lone woman sits in grimy, oil-caked dust, a tattered baseball hat haphazardly falling off her head. She [is] wearing a pair of well-used canvas gloves, a wrench in one hand with other tools stuffed in her back pocket. She is in a reflective moment of rest, but follow her gaze, past the upturned hulk of rusting, obsolete machinery, beyond the boundary of the photograph itself and over to its companion photograph on the adjoining page. Here, an automated robot truck carrying a SeaLand container does its job, undisturbed in a presumed fantastical technological utopia. Later, at the end of the chapter in a caption list, we learn the woman's name is Pancake, a former shipyard worker, and she is scavenging copper from a waterfront scrapyard in the Port of Los Angeles. And we learn that the truck, the object of Pancake's gaze, is of the robotic, automated kind designed to move containers in the Port of Rotterdam (and displace labourers like her). On the left page: Pancake, someone who has been left behind and forgotten by the instrumental forces of profit, mobility, and compatibility. On the right: the manifestation of a relentless march towards profit, created by the desires of mobility and the necessity for innovation, technology, and containerization.[266]

Sekula's photograph of Pancake reminds us of the cruel indifference of systematized shipping, the needs of globalization laid bare and its secrets exposed. These examples are indicative of Sekula's mode of working, what he termed "purposeful immersion."[267] He phrased it as "putting oneself in the position of the ocean swimmer, timing one's strokes to the swell, turning one's submerged ear with every breath to the deep rumble of stones rolling on the bottom far below."[268] I see it as attentiveness to the morphological and visible aspects of a landscape in order to puncture the surface and release what festers below, rising to become palpable and viewable. Sekula focuses on visible surfaces for its action and power, emphasizing the material and corporeal to unveil the violence and disorder "entwined in the muck and dirt of capital circulation."[269]

2.9 LANDSCAPE-AS-MORPHOLOGY: ALMOST THERE

Just as Sekula did in *Fish Story*, Jackson signals the necessity of looking across the spectrum of visibilities. He said that: "Those of us who undertake to study landscapes in a serious way soon come up against a sobering truth: even the simplest, least interesting landscape often contains elements which we are quite unable to explain, mysteries that fit into no known pattern. But we also eventually learn that every landscape, no matter how exotic, also contains elements which we at once recognize and understand."[270]

Landscape is a compendium of visibilities, from the transparent to the opaque. Astute observation — "purposeful immersion" — shows how the visual realm of what can be directly seen and experienced is a start for

266 Weber, "Dirty Pictures," 47-49.

267 Allan Sekula, "Between the Net and the Deep Blue Sea (Rethinking the Traffic in Photographs)," *October* 102 (2002): 7.

268 Sekula, "Between the Net," 7.

269 Weber, "Dirty Pictures," 49.

270 Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 11.

generating further questions. So, while it may be merely descriptive, and at worst it places too much emphasis on the directly seen, landscape-as-morphology does assert the necessity to pay attention to the physical and spatial world. A second point: landscape-as-morphology connects us to a reality through the physical, where the material affirms comprehension of society's functions. Everyone reads landscapes in their everyday lives as a way of navigating, and perhaps even as clues to meaning. Doing so invokes good citizenship, creating a reciprocal relationship to the built environment, potentially even providing wellbeing within particular landscapes. Taking care and consideration of one's surroundings, regardless if its vernacular or official, prevents any landscape retreating from view. Sauer's original quest, while naively given, is also a powerful concept to start the process of legibility and responsibility. However, is it enough? I doubt it is.

Doubt lies in my already stated claim that official landscapes are, as reinforced by Stephen Daniels, sites of exorbitant duplicity and occlusion, cunning spaces for camouflaging and naturalizing power relations as invisible (to the public).[271] That means I have to build upon the morphological, not dismiss it. As an accrual of phenomena that leave a mark on the surface and in local contexts, logistical landscapes are also constitutive of much, much larger, perhaps even incomprehensible, geographic scales. Going back to Lewis's assertion that the landscape is our unwitting biography, there's something I cannot shake. If landscape *is* an autobiography, then what *kind* of autobiography would the Port of Rotterdam write? I am not sure a full autobiography could even be written, because as stated, landscapes are only ever partial, even as physical entities. And, landscapes are not just visible manifestations of human activity, but they are also in a hidden and invisible partnership with the physical and visible. That is why a landscape such as the logistical (if not all landscapes) can never be a complete autobiography. But this is a fatalistic approach, signaling it is not worth trying, which I don't believe to be true. Again, harkening back to Sekula, there are *just enough* traces that can be registered on the landscape's surface to see them in concrete form and to begin a comprehensive photographic relationship with the economic and political order that underwrites such topography, albeit, as Sekula declared in *Fish Story*, "in enigmatic, misleading, reductive and superficial terms."[272]

For Sauer, Sekula, and Lewis, landscape is material and physical, awaiting patiently for its interpretation into the values and desires of the culture that made it. An added caveat though, especially in relation to official landscapes, is the overt attention that must be paid to the sneaky dissembling of what happens beyond the fences to see inside the circuits of power. Denis Cosgrove critiques this idea of only the physical as a means to knowledge, arguing that a focus solely on physical attributes for epistemological revelation is not enough.[273] According to Don Mitchell, Cosgrove posited that a morphological approach was politically suspect and incomplete if those very ideological considerations inherent to landscape were ignored.[274] However, confronting landscape's ideological tendencies would make those landscapes politically relevant. Cosgrove was casually dismissive of Sauer's project, saying that with "the morphological method landscape becomes a static determinant of scientific enquiry."[275]

271 Daniels, "Marxism" 196-220.

272 Sekula, *Fish Story*, xi.

273 Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

274 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 4.

275 Cosgrove, *Social Formation*, 16.

I do not fully subscribe to Cosgrove's notion, because, if landscape is to be stripped only to landscape-as-representation, then the social relations of a given landscape are suspended in static form, fixed in place as a representation that naturalizes the orders of power as an incontestable entity. I have learned through my photographic practice that "picture" does not necessarily mean a literal photograph; this is made most stark in Bureau Mission One and the accompanying series of photographs where I argued that in a logistical landscape, social relations are suspended in and by the material qualities of landscape itself. I termed this bureaucratic vision, a phenomenon that solidifies social and power relations that results in a "picture" — the California Dream, for example. This picture projects outward to a beholding public, fixed via distance and other means. In such circumstances, the morphological still has relevance because it looks at the physical site from the point of view of its surface tendencies and its sliding scale of visibilities, and also because it recognizes when a landscape is a projection of power, an ideological construction precisely because of its morphological structure. That does not mean I reject Cosgrove's line of thought, as he argues for the necessity to understand the picture of a landscape and its ideological power. The morphological position opens up paths for a further and elaborate understanding. But that, as American geographer James Duncan has said, is only half the story of landscape.[276]

I began this chapter stating that landscape is a unity of materiality and representation.[277] Conceiving of landscape as a physical site is necessary to contest and, potentially, visualize the various social and power relations inherent to official landscapes. However, this is only a first step; I must also explore how landscape's ideological form as manifested by various modes of representation, such as my own landscape photography practice and bureaucratic procedures, constructs meaning. Logistical landscapes are not only cunning acts of duplicity seeking to evade capture, but they also produce "pictures" that naturalize and materialize power into a view. I now turn to exploring landscape as a view, and how this introduces its ideological footprint. Landscape, as I will argue, is not just experienced, but also seen, a visual ideology made manifest via its physical construction as an image to be consumed and viewed.

2.10 THE SIGHT OF LANDSCAPE

Landscape is a way of seeing as much as it is morphological.[278] Representations — in my case, photography — are a powerful force in how we see, and interpret, the world around us beyond its physical shape. As such, landscape is more than an assemblage of various actors and objects that produces the appearance of an area; it is also imbued with various symbols that reveal themselves through its reading. This is the flip side of landscape's previously stated duplicitous character, functioning not just to reflect power in society, but also actively working to create, reproduce, and naturalize that power.[279] Landscape, as frequently argued by a variety of scholars across disciplines, can also be read as a text with careful attention paid to its symbolic systems (not dissimilar to Pierce Lewis's contention that a landscape

276 James Duncan, "After the Civil War: Reconstructing Cultural Geography as Heterotopia," in *Re-Reading Cultural Geography*, eds. K. Foote, P. Hugill, K. Mathewson, and J. Smith (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 401-408.

277 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 28.

278 Cosgrove, *Social Formation*, 16. And: Berger, *Ways of Seeing*.

279 Daniels, "Marxism," 196-220.

is like an unwitting autobiography).[280] However, the difference lies in the notion of looking at a site to emphasize its representation and the effects this has on the production of meaning through perspectival control and ordering. The shift involves moving from reading and interpreting landscape as a constituent piece of morphological evidence, to recognizing it as an ideological image constructed by various representational practices. This transfer from landscape's morphological condition to its symbolic offers an alternative route to comprehending power relations encoded within landscape. It was Cosgrove who yoked the development of the capitalist economy to the deployment of perspective in order to commodify land into property via landscape representation.[281] This constructed view became a way of seeing that naturalized the ownership of property and land as a proprietorial gaze through two means: two-dimensional representations, such as painting (and, later, photography), and materially in the form of parks and gardens and other built forms in landscape and urban design.[282] Representations of landscape were an ideological act meant to fix or naturalize relations of power, creating a bourgeois class formed through a specific way of seeing, a reflection back of themselves. This registration of land has resonance for my own work because it indicates how the use of perspective alongside the material can outwardly project, and reproduce, power relations.[283]

Landscape, according to British geographer Gillian Rose, is a visual ideology. When a site is governed as a way of seeing, a form of sight, it privileges the gaze and perspectival vision as well as material control of land.[284] The conflation of image and reality is a slippery slope when it comes to landscape and the built environment because ideology can manifest in material form. An example of this is the skylines of major cities, where skyscrapers and other forms of architecture are built not just as repositories of financial speculation and containers housing a workforce but as symbols of an ideological system that projects itself outwards to the populace.[285] The construction of views is important because the representations themselves may further engrain such depictions as a kind of incontestable reality, invoking further manifestations of these power relations back into the built environment. The land becomes a thing shaped by and within the frame, a visually ideological creation meant to be gazed upon and displayed as a managed, and, perhaps, even a celebratory view. Cosgrove states that this view is an act of erasure, eliminating from the frame the very processes and relations of labour and production that went into its construction, ensuring a vista of property to be indulgently viewed.[286]

2.11 TAKING A LESSON FROM GEOGRAPHY LESSON: CANADIAN NOTES

I once again return to Allan Sekula to help comprehend the symbolic landscape as conjured through photographic and architectural representation. However, this time I head closer to my own homeland, Canada, for a short sojourn into his publication *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes*.[287] Sekula travelled to Canada in 1984, visiting two disparate yet intimately linked locations: the nation's capital, Ottawa, specifically the headquarters of the Bank of Canada — emblematic of economic power and policy — and the dirty

280 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Vintage, 1973).

281 Cosgrove, *Social Formation*.

282 Daniels and Cosgrove, "Introduction: Iconography and Landscape.

283 Gillian Rose, "Looking at Landscape: The Uneasy Pleasures of Power," in *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

284 Rose, "Looking at Landscape."

285 Christine Boyer, "The City of Illusion: New York's Public Places," in *The Restless Urban Landscape*, ed. Paul L. Knox (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993), 111-126.

286 Cosgrove, *Social Formation*,

287 Allan Sekula, *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997).

and grim town of Sudbury, Ontario, known colloquially as the "Big Nickel," a city that embodies the environmental and social repercussions of industrial exploitation and economic development.[288] By juxtaposing two such cities, Sekula draws out the conflicts of the Canadian landscape — specifically the conflict between the demand for political power and economic exploitation, and Canadians's own self-mythologizing of Nature in spite of massive industrial alteration. Sekula deftly uses photography and text to explore the multitudinous and contradictory layers of meaning embedded within the Canadian landscape, revealing the ways that landscapes are imbued with ideological significance. In particular, Sekula draws on the iconography of Canadian money, which, to this day, features verdant plains, snow-capped peaks, wild animals, and other vestiges of landscape that never really was. In 1984, such natural fantasies were partnered with productive landscapes: the one-dollar bill featured Ottawa's Rideau Canal festooned with felled timber on its way from forest to sawmill; the five-dollar bill depicted a salmon trawler off the coast of Vancouver Island, while the ten-dollar note proudly displayed the bulbous shapes and forms of Sarnia, Ontario's massive petrochemical and refining complex.

288 There literally is a big nickel, a 9-meter-tall replica of a Canadian five-cent coin that I remember as a kid was on the roadside as one entered this decayed and hollowed-out town; the town being a victim of neoliberal policy and intense extraction that eventually drained it of viability. Today, however, it has made a minor comeback.

289 Sekula, *Geography Lesson*, 11.

Throughout the book, Sekula features photographs of this money and photographs of the landscapes featured on the image of that money. In one photograph, titled *Photographer with Two Views of Parliament Hill from Hull, Quebec*, a woman, presumably the photographer of the caption, is framed about mid-waist level to the right of the picture and stands with a one-dollar bill outstretched in both hands [Fig.14].[289] This is the first view Sekula alludes to in the title. It is a typically Canadian cold day, the distance caked in snow while the Parliament buildings rising up from a granite mound in the background. The second view hinted at in the photograph's title is the same landscape but now framed within the one-dollar bill. Here, instead of a snowy day, the money's scene depicts the aforementioned timber rafting down the canal with Parliament lording above. In the same spread, the other three remaining photos feature various views of the boardroom of the Bank of Canada. This is a common trope throughout the book, showing pictures of currency that feature (productive) landscapes alongside photos of those actual landscapes. Sekula clearly delineates the physical landscape and its transformation into a representation that highlights political and state power. These photographs ask us, the viewer, to comprehend how economic value is assigned and how landscapes are idealized and abstracted into national mythologies. The photographs express the tension between the material condition of land and its symbolic conversion into economic instruments. In turn, Sekula questions the implications of such representations for our understanding of how place, value, and identity are intertwined.

[Fig.14]

Another set of photographs further deepens Sekula's approach to reevaluating the landscape as an ideological site. This pivotal sequence defines the publication's start [Fig.15]. On the left, a typical architectural photograph of downtown Ottawa with its iconic Parliament Hill facing the Bank of Canada. It is a grey, cold day; the streets are filled with remnants of a previous snowfall. Each building is tucked in amidst the city's architectural fabric, with Parliament's copper-clad steeple puncturing the flat grey sky. On the right, the dingy mining town of Sudbury. Sekula's camera is tilted down, depicting a slurry of grey-ish rocks slathered in fine mud superimposed by the index

[Fig.15]

of his shadow.[290] Sekula's photography and sequencing bridges complex geographies while weaving a narrative of interdependence, never excluding people from their matrix of material signs. As noted in a subsequent essay, he exerts commitment to portraying the inseparable relations between humans and their surrounding material and symbolic environments.[291]

Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes examines landscape as symbolic and physical, revealing the entanglement of — and importance of — land to project national ideologies, myths, and power dynamics. Sekula uses photography to analyze and expose the varied social relations embodied within the landscape, while asking viewers to see how the view is constructed, and naturalized, into (Canadian) consciousness. As such, he undermines and contests the meanings ascribed to symbolic landscapes, yet also uses this as a technique to reveal the contradictions within the symbolic construction of Canada's national narrative. Landscape, as demonstrated in Sekula's publication, illustrates how it is not merely a backdrop (for money, as an example) but a product of sight that shapes and is shaped by social perceptions, thereby reproducing and fixing particular relations of power within, and as, scenery. The symbolic characteristics of landscape, Sekula demonstrates, work to naturalize social relations, reinforcing existing structures of authority and influence.

2.12 FINAL CALL: SITE RETURNS TO SIGHT

Landscape, when considered as sight, is symbolic of individual activity and cultural ideals, but is also central to the manifestation of those very ideals.[292] As sight, landscape is transformed into an image, meant to be viewed from afar, gazed upon and admired. Such distance produces a lack of action on behalf of the viewer, because, in the tradition of landscape as an object to behold from afar, we tend to admire that which is over there rather than inquiring into what is right here. Distance enables power relations to become freed from scrutinizing eyes, existing well beyond any degree of contestable vision. The Port of Rotterdam, just as Sekula showed in *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes*, is a fixed landscape image. This is partly caused by logistics since great distances and complexes of security arrangements are necessary for the Port to function, thus transforming it into an image that projects its ideology outwards, intermittently gazed upon by onlookers.

The image of the Port establishes its presence as a necessity, something beyond my ability to comprehend, like an already written future (as I alluded to earlier when speaking about the Port Authority's *FutureLand* interpretive centre). As an authority, a location, and an image, the Port's logistical infrastructure is pre-given, an inevitable outcome of Dutch maritime history and engineering. Whenever I am out there, I do not feel connected to the view. This is probably because the port is constructed out of a nebulous set of political protocols that occur beyond any reciprocal relationship with the everyday and vernacular. It is *their* site, not ours. The Port is an ideological expression of values represented through the material conditions of the site, but also represented not just *in* sight, but *as* a sight. That is, the Port's

290 The lefthand image is titled: *Ottawa, Looking west along Wellington Street from Parliament Hill. Second building on left, Bank of Canada*. Its companion on the right is simply titled *Slag, Sudbury*. Sekula, *Geography Lesson*, 4-5.

291 John O'Brian, "Memory Flash Points," in Sekula *Geography Lesson*, 79.

292 Richard H. Schein. "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, 4 (1997): 660-680.

visual ideology is a normative expression represented in and by its built environment and bureaucratic form.[293]

Viewing the landscape as a symbolic entity that subsequently materializes ideology in a form and as a representation is an incomplete approach to understanding the complex workings of a logistical landscape. This was Don Mitchell's concern in his famous proposition between the "old" and "new" geography: he argued that "new" geography renders everything as a social construction, relegating the physical site to a backdrop against which the far more thrilling prospect of social relations plays itself out amongst signs and symbols. In "old" geography, it was a naive assumption that land was evidential and thus readable, waiting for descriptive analysis to reveal itself as culture. Mitchell argues that you cannot separate sight from site because landscape both facilitates and hides the relations of production that went into its creation. Any reduction to the purely symbolic and landscape becomes nothing more than a device for these obscuring actions, not a significant part of its make-up. Landscape, according to Mitchell, must be understood as a union of the material and symbolic.[294] Siding with Mitchell, varied scholars like W.J.T. Mitchell, Margaret FitzSimmons, and Allan Sekula all remind us that there is actual, physical work that goes into the shaping of the land. The work of landscape exists in its creation as a physical, brutal form, but also actively retreats to hide its very function as an enclave of power. However, similarly to the morphological landscape, there are significant reasons to focus on its symbolic aspects.

A study of landscape and how it becomes a visual construction through a symbolic ordering via representation reveals how the landscape, particularly the official and logistical, is naturalized as fixed producing uncontested space. Positioning the Port through a symbolic lens (also a literal lens), shows how representation plays a crucial role in forming and shaping how we interpret the world. This singular reading of landscape, however, often denies the existence of its physical counterpart outside representation. According to Don Mitchell, the "abandonment of the material world as an object of study in order to focus exclusively on the politics of reading, language, and iconography represents a dangerous politics."[295] I follow the Jacksonian notion of landscape that exists in *addition* to its pictorial and representational conditions, and prefer to formulate it as a collection or system that organizes space to comprehend the social and power relations of any given site. Jackson indicates that site and sight produce a form of visual entanglement, while also serving as a reminder that landscape is an experience with the everyday world: "A portion of the earth's surface that can be comprehended at a glance."[296] Site and sight cannot be severed from each other, just as the word landscape has become entangled with both notions of *land-* and *-scape*, a compounded meaning. To recall Henri Lefebvre, it is space that gives ideology its referent.[297] It is just not possible to engage landscape's social and power relations from a merely representative point of view, nor exclusively on its physical conditions either. Rather, hierarchy is stripped down so material considerations of sight lay alongside its ideological representation to truly engage with the landscapes of our lives. To understand how landscape works, *land-* and *-scape* need to fuse and become a composite of, and for, site and sight.

293 Timothy Oakes and Patricia L. Price, "Introduction to Part Three," in *The Cultural Geography Reader*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 151.

294 Don Mitchell, "There's No Such Thing as Culture: Towards a Reconceptualization of the Idea of Culture in Geography," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20, no. 1 (1995): 102-116.

295 Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, 26.

296 Jackson, "The Word Itself," 8.

297 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 44.

2.13 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have introduced and built out the generative concept of site and sight. By site, I emphasized the material aspects of landscape, which recognizes that a physical location and its topographical surface is a vital source to discover and reveal how land use is an active agent in shaping — and is shaped by — landscape. Attentiveness to the physical transformations of a site manufactured by logistics is one part of comprehending visible realities while also exposing the underlying structures that shape those realities. This, as I demonstrated through the presentation of Allan Sekula's *Fish Story* and *Geography Lesson: Canadian Notes* is a testament to photography's documentary capacity to disclose the visible world as much as a release of that which remains simmering below the surface. Site's partner, sight, works in cooperation with the former to lay bare the ideological and symbolic structures inherent to an official landscape, affecting how the site is understood and valued. The logistical landscape carries meaning beyond its physical characteristics, serving as symbol and ideological canvas to reinforce already-established narratives, such as, in the case of the Port of Rotterdam, an inevitable future already written by the Port Authority.

I have demonstrated how site and sight work in unifying, and at times disparate, ways to open up the closed narrative of an official landscape by suggesting a dialectical relationship that shapes human comprehension and the physical conditions of site itself. My aim was to bring into stark relief the complex, and perhaps even contradictory, relationship between the physical reality of the logistical landscape (site) and the various cultural, political, and economic frames through which these sites are viewed (sight). As I move forward in the dissertation, site and sight form a generative foundation. Chapter 3, for example, turns to the practice of landscape photography, which so far I have positioned as processual and experiential, in addition to its expressive layer. Site and sight, when fused together, produce an insightful practice that reveals not just surface conditions but also draws out the relationship between human action and cultural perceptions.

Moving into Chapter 3, I examine through various examples the role of landscape photography as not just an act of recording but also as an active participant that constructs the site both physically and symbolically. I focus on a set of specific and mostly marginal practices from the bevy of photographers commissioned by administrative and bureaucratic bodies to depict infrastructural landscapes in order to serve practical policy needs. By emphasizing such practices, I show how other, non-expressive forms of photography influence land use policy, cultural heritage, and public engagement. I argue that such landscape photographic practices both reveal and construct realities, with the potential to shape public perception and achieve legibility. Utilizing such examples of undervalued landscape photographic practices connects the conceptual outline I have so far drawn in Chapters 1 and 2, and now draws practical outcomes tangential to my own interests.

CH 03

LAND-SCAPE PHOTO-GRAPHY AS AN ADMINI-STRATIVE PRACTICE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I construct a rudimentary genealogy of landscape photographic practices that centres landscape not as an inert subject to be represented as a set of singular views but as a dynamic medium through which wider political implications like urban planning and environmental issues have been considered photographically. Specifically, I look beyond the landscape genre's expressive history and highlight examples of landscape photographic practices that serve both topographical and symbolic purposes. My interest lies in the marginalized bureaucratic use of (landscape) photography, where photographers are rendered anonymous as technicians, or, at best, as hybridized artist–technicians. Throughout the chapter, I use a series of concrete examples. What happens when photography is practiced on an institutional and administrative level, at the margins of artistic discourse? Can such a path contribute to revealing the logistical condition of the present day? An administrative framing of photography, I argue, has unique potential to portray land use as material and laden with cultural meaning.

My aim in this chapter is to not cover the entirety of the genre nor even to offer an overview; that has, for example, already been pursued in-depth by British photography scholar Liz Wells in her publication *Landscape Matters*.[298] I do, however, start this chapter from a very particular photographic moment as a narrative bridge, a moment that still loudly resonates today and maintains outsize influence on how landscape photography is practiced and considered. I begin with a cursory outline of what became known as the New Topographic movement, which American photography curator Britt Salvesen argues portended a paradigm shift for photography, a sentiment with which I wholly agree.[299] Personally, the New Topographics still hold great sway. But, regardless of one's thoughts towards their photographic output, I contend that as a landscape photographer one must reconcile with the New Topographics and position them within one's own timeline. The New Topographics start this chapter yet I move past them in order to linger with the far-less considered bureaucratic dimension of landscape photography. My desire is to acknowledge and introduce the New Topographics as singular beacons, yet my ultimate goal is to find other practices and methods that I find more suitable to contend with the logistical landscape and encourage legibility.

Once I establish the New Topographics as a lodestar within landscape photography, I move away from such overt artistic practices and introduce various government-sponsored photographic "missions" conducted throughout France in the 1980s and 1990s. These missions aimed to document the nation's ongoing landscape changes within the bureaucratic context of territorial planning, setting a precedent for the practical and symbolic use of photography within governmental frameworks. Friction, I will argue, inevitably rises when instrumental demands meet artistic intention. For example, the French missions were not only documentary and artistic in nature, but they also intersected with urban development and conservation

298 Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2011), 6.

299 Britt Salvesen, "New Topographics," in *New Topographics*, by Robert Adams et al. (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona; Rochester, NY: *George Eastman* House International Museum of Photography and Film; Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 55.

efforts, thereby influencing policy decisions and public attitudes towards those decisions. I am interested in how photographers, when relegated to bureaucratic functionaries, navigated conflicts between creative instincts and instrumental demands with artistic expression and bureaucratic utility colliding.

Following these French missions, I introduce the relationship of landscape photography to the birthing of the United States's National Park Service. However, instead of focusing on celebrated landscape photographers associated with the parks system, like Ansel Adams, I introduce an unknown cast of government officials, agencies, and commercial interests, all of whom relied on photography to reinforce the parks as symbols of American ideology, while also being tasked with the documentation of sewage infrastructure, land surveying, and chronicling tourist activities, among other things. The French missions and my foray into the U.S. National Park Service function as a kind of laboratory to assist in the positioning and development of my own landscape photography practice — of which the dissertation's final three chapters explicitly attend to — while also allowing other conceptions of photography to thrive in addition to the genre's well-established art historical lineage. A byproduct of such an overview is to expand the genre's historical boundaries, introducing the expressive with the instrumental.

3.2 THE NEW TOPOGRAPHICS

October 1975 is a moment when landscape photography would forever be changed. Opening at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape* was at first a modest affair. It's since been called the "greatest show never seen," and only appeared at two other locations after its initial run.[300] Yet rarely has an exhibition seen by so few had such a lasting influence. Almost forty years after its initial run, the same exhibition was remounted.[301] The New Topographics, as it came to be colloquially known, featured eight then-young American photographers: Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, Joe Deal, Frank Gohlke, Nicholas Nixon, John Schott, Stephen Shore (the only one among these who shot coloured film), and Henry Wessel Jr. Jenkins also invited the German couple Bernd and Hilla Becher (who was the lone woman in the group). Devised in the aftermath of the 1960s and the economic instability and changing social norms of the 1970s, the New Topographics portended a severing of landscape photography from it stultified, idealized past and its present which recognized the vernacular and mundane of the ordinary landscape. Salvesen writes, "There are telephone wires, mobile homes, main streets, office parks, parking lots, bungalows, motels, and motorways; plainly prosaic views of New England, Los Angeles, and numerous points between."[302] To me, this is their primary legacy: establishing a new set of pictorial criteria that more than adequately responded to the burgeoning and novel spatial conditions of their time, transcending nostalgic historicism and the picturesque in favour of an "ordinary" landscape that was relevant at that specific moment.[303] I view this as a vital lesson for my own practice, to seek photographic form that attests to the contemporary

300 Toby Jurovics, "Same As it Ever Was: Re-reading New Topographics," in *Reframing the New Topographics*, eds. Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1.

301 Salvesen, "New Topographics."

302 Salvesen, "New Topographics," 11.

303 On the ordinary landscape, see the collected essays in: J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

spatial conditions wrought by logistics, which is why I (partly) introduce the New Topographics now. It's fair to say that this exhibition really was the moment when the rift between what landscape photography was and what it could be was laid bare. Prior to this show, the landscape genre was generally the depiction of natural scenery, shorn of any man-made presence, replete with sublime, picturesque, or pastoral views of breathtaking scenery. William Jenkins's curation of the New Topographics attempted to discard all those conventions and set forward a different conception, one that focused on the photographic erasures of Ansel Adams and his cohort and set forward a path to accommodate the rapid commercialization and suburbanization of the American landscape. It was a show that offered a jolt to the conventions of landscape photography and reflected the state of the country as it was, not how it "should" be.[304]

Jenkins, writing in his introductory curatorial essay, stated that the idea of the "topographical" implied a disengaged attitude, an objective stance that transcended style because topography is connected to surveying and mapping, functions that belong to measurement and not what he called "aesthetic judgement."[305] I do not think this supposedly neutral view is indicative of the photographers included in this exhibition — a stance also argued thoroughly in the contemporary essay compendium *Reframing the New Topographics* — nor were the photographs neutral in appearance because of the particular sites of their making.[306] Britt Salvesen, who restaged the 1975 exhibition nearly forty years after its origin, argues that the New Topographic photographers made conscious choices about what kinds of photographs they wanted to produce.[307] While they all expressed, to some extent, relatively committed views towards ecological matters, and they desired to bring attention to the ill-considered realm of what they labelled the man-altered landscape — its admixture of suburban sprawl and middle-class consumption — the lingering aftertaste that was paramount to their photographic production was in coming to terms with the hangover of modernism's decades-long grip on the photograph, and in struggling against inherited conventions of the landscape genre.[308] However, as I shortly argue, they did not, in my view, quite break ties with modernism, unlike their brethren in other disciplines. For example, architects Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi's 1972 publication *Learning from Las Vegas* had already blown wide open consideration of the so-called ugly and vernacular landscape of Las Vegas, sticking it right into the pantheon of architectural discourse amidst Ancient Rome and the Renaissance to force a reconsideration of the role of mass culture in contemporary society. Similarly, the BBC-produced *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles*, an exuberant ode from 1972 to the city everyone loves to hate by the British architectural historian Reyner Banham, featured a not-so-surprising guest appearance by the American artist Ed Ruscha riffing on Los Angeles's vernacular Googie architecture.

Part of what gets lost in the topographic discussions of the work of the New Topographics is the particular context and milieu within which they were working at the time. As Joe Deal, one of the New Topographic photographers said, "We found out that we were really interested in a kind of attitude that came through Atget, Walker Evans and Ed Ruscha and was just being done by a lot of young photographers."[309] In other words, the seemingly

304 John Rohrbach, "Introduction," in *Reframing the New Topographics*, eds. Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), xiii.

305 Jenkins infers that topographical photography should, ideally, resist the influence of personal taste and conventions and aim for an unbiased, so-called objective portrayal of the landscape See: William Jenkins, "Introduction to New Topographics," quoted in Britt Salvesen, "New Topographics," in *New Topographics*, by Robert Adams et al. (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona; Rochester, NY: George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film; Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 250.

306 Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach, eds., *Reframing the New Topographics* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013).

307 Salvesen, "New Topographics," 11-67.

308 Salvesen, "New Topographics," 11-67.

309 Chris Wilson, "Photography and the Quickening of Cultural Landscape Studies," in *Photoscapes: The Nexus between Photography and Landscape Design*, ed. Frédéric Pousin (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019), 67.

detached viewpoint intimated by Jenkins disguised an intense concern for environmental degradation, the changing values of the American landscape, and significantly, a desire to challenge the canonical traditions of an exhausted genre.[310]

For me, the New Topographics's groundbreaking shift was not a matter of style, but in their ability to sever ties from their predecessors and construct a new language indicative of their time and spatial milieu. As American photography curator John Rohrbach makes clear in his introductory essay in the aforementioned publication *Reframing the New Topographics*, there were two distinct maneuvers: first, each photographer sought a distinct visual break from the romantic or sublime past of depicting landscape as a pristine wilderness, and second, an environmental consciousness was paramount in all their works, asking audiences to embrace the common landscape as something to be recognized and not to reserve such care solely for unattainable Nature.[311] While our circumstances are vastly different, the New Topographics pointed a way to an alternative form of landscape consciousness, highlighting, for me, the necessity that every generation undergoes their own particular spatial moment, and as a landscape photographer, one has to acquire relevant tools — and language — to address these ongoing changes in society. These photographers, while not the first, were certainly the most prolific and everlasting to retool landscape photography towards the ordinary, vernacular landscape.

One of the exhibited photographers of the New Topographics, Robert Adams, once said that he was looking to produce "a normal view of the landscape. Almost."[312] I, too, am looking for a similar picture. In my view, what Adams meant was to harken back to photography's near-founding and its utilitarian function. That is, the American survey photographs were crucial to the building of a New Topographic approach, one predicated on the medium's capacity that operates without precedent or convention. As Salvesen states, "the New Topographics extracted what was useful to them: [...] the idea of the survey, understood as an extended sequence with archival rather than narrative coherence; and an appreciation of technique and craftsmanship."[313] So why, you might ask, is there a lingering doubt over my allegiance to the New Topographics? Partly because, as Salvesen notes, "within just a generation or two, landscapes [...] found their way from utilitarian contexts into aesthetic ones."[314] Indeed, Allan Sekula and the American art historian Rosalind Krauss each write extensively on the subsumption of what was ostensibly a bureaucratic condition of photography transformed into a celebrated and quintessentially modern form.[315] The issue I have is that while the New Topographics helped usher in an era where landscape conventions were no longer bound to the universalizing depiction of Nature as untouched and separate from culture and instead celebrated the vernacular and everyday, their works — with fifty years of review — were thoroughly canonized as expressive artifacts, elevating the primacy of artistic expression over the politics of land use. I am writing this decades after the initial exhibition, so I can only comment on a contemporary evaluation.

Much like how Krauss argues the geological survey photographers of the 19th century were subsumed and elevated into objects with fine art status, the New Topographics themselves have reached similar heights, estab-

310 Salvesen, "New Topographics," 27.

311 Rohrbach, "Introduction," xiii-xxv.

312 Carol Digrappa, ed., *Robert Adams in Landscape: Theory* (New York: Lustrum Press, 1980), 12, quoted in Britt Salvesen, "New Topographics," in *New Topographics*, by Robert Adams et al. (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona; Rochester, NY: George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film; Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 37.

313 Salvesen, "New Topographics," 38.

314 Salvesen, "New Topographics," 37.

315 Allan Sekula, "The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War," in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (London: MACK, 2016), 33-51. And: Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (1982): 311-319.

lished by the museum context and by their own self-identification as artists.[316] I am interested in documents of life, not works of art.

3.3 AN AMICABLE DIVORCE

In Bureau Mission Two, I introduce what I term the "topographic photograph," which is a systematic approach to scrutinizing the available surfaces of a logistical landscape. There, I argue that such a photograph is an active participant, even agent, as it simultaneously documents and negotiates logistical space on a detailed level. I raise this point because these photographs might appear at first glance to be neutral, but, like those of the New Topographics, they are not. The irony is that the New Topographic photographers were not so topographic, at least in conforming to Jenkins's initial framing. In his curatorial essay, Jenkins cracks open the dictionary and relays the definition of topography, writing that the exhibition photographs were "reduced to essentially a topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion and opinion."[317] My photographs are probably closer to his initial proposal of a true topographical image — "little more than frames laid on the world" — than any of those produced by the actual New Topographics photographers.[318]

New Topographic photographs were subjective, making use of formal language and symbolism, hallmarks of modernist photography. Robert Adams and Frank Gohlke, two of the New Topographic photographers, identified "form as the vehicle that points to the emotional truths in their images, a fundamentally traditional position that seems much closer to Edward Weston than Ed Ruscha."[319] Craftsmanship was crucial to the New Topographic photographers. Many used large- and medium-format cameras in order to draw out clarity of detail and render as high a quality of print as possible. They worked "self-consciously" within and against established conventions, and at the time of the exhibition, all were starting to achieve some kind of art-market credibility (with all of them going on to stellar art-world careers in the ensuing decades).[320] Even the context of the New Topographics exhibition — in one of the bastions of American photography, the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York (the home of Kodak!) — speaks to their ultimately conservative vision of photography as a neat and orderly progression, where even a style-less style is still an artist's formal decision. Careful appraisal was given to each photograph's size and framing, with special attention paid to its reproduction as an art object by emphasizing its print.[321] The New Topographics were generally practicing within the lineage of an entrenched genre, with ground-breaking attention shifted towards subject matter, not necessarily in its photographic execution. Their photos are generally straightforward, classical in composition and sophisticated in execution. A caveat, though: Joe Deal, by eliminating the horizon in his photographs, or Stephen Shore's use of colour and prominent framing of infrastructural detritus like telephone poles, was certainly pushing the limits of acceptable landscape photography representation, splitting the opinions of critics, photographers, and tastemakers of the time [Fig.16, 17].[322]

316 For Krauss's argument, see: Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 311-319. For the New Topographics, see: Salvesen, "New Topographics," 51.

317 Jenkins, quoted in Salvesen, "New Topographics," 250.

318 Rohrbach, "Introduction," xx.

319 Jurovics, "Same As it Ever Was," 6.

320 After the exhibition, many of the photographers would be validated with hallmarks of art world success. See: Salvesen, "New Topographics," 54-56.

321 Salvesen, "New Topographics," 54.

322 Rohrbach notes that critics in general were sympathetic to the photographers's commitment to the environmental movement and the common landscape, while those who identified as artist-photographers, especially landscape photographers, were deeply critical, reacting with confusion and anger. See: Rohrbach, "Introduction," xix.

[Fig.16]

[Fig.17]

And this is where the (amicable) divorce between myself and the New Topographics occurs, in their marriage to disciplinary boundaries, formal concerns, and art world consideration. As stated, they used technical proficiency and skilled craftsmanship to create exquisite photographs of engineered entropy, ensuring their suitability for what Rosalind Krauss labels "exhibitionality": the production of photographs as "signifiers of inclusion" within a particular context that shapes the photograph's intended meaning.[323] To me, I see an intense set of artistic parameters that each photographer was striving for, responsive to their own art historical concerns and their personal political subjectivities about the sites and places they were photographing. In my case, these parameters do not exist in the same way. What I am seeking is a photography that is more of a practical tool directly related to land use issues and public perception.

While the New Topographics and my own work both deploy a "camera-as-recording device," notably in what I frame the topographic photograph, our difference lies in breaking with tradition.[324] The New Topographic photographers were saddled with a conscious desire to splinter from formal tradition and release themselves from modernism's expressive tendencies, yet they were ultimately still fairly committed in their desire to satisfy photography's demands as art. They punctured a formal lineage from photographers such as Ansel Adams and Eliot Porter [Fig.18, 19] by focusing on the banalities of the contemporary and modern landscape, unafraid of vernacular messiness and urban sprawl, yet still they approached photography in a very formal, "straight" way.[325] Looking at their photographs, I see objects that were tightly controlled and a consciousness of framing, depth of field, tonality, and other considerations consistent with modernism's formal values. Their proclivity to practice historical self-reflexivity and to re-examine the genre's legacies shares values with my own photography, yet the approaches are different. Their landscape politics I abide; it's the formal treatment and disciplinary commitment where we part ways.

I am not so concerned with the finality of the photograph itself, but I am concerned with what I argue for in Chapter 4, what I term the "extra-photographic": a process of simultaneously reconfiguring landscape practice while attending to the many manipulations of land via logistics, and also exploring how a public can reimagine these landscapes anew. As such, the artistic component of this research — in the most straightforward sense — lies in its diffusion of photography, not in its representation. I am satisfied to fall in sync with the anonymous surveyors, geographers, and bureaucratic agencies engaged in image-capture, with the added goal of creating landscape interventions.

[Fig.18]

[Fig.19]

What the New Topographics do provide me, however, is a vital contribution to reconceptualizing what landscape photography could become by highlighting the "cultural landscape." Their efforts, alongside the efforts of others like Robert Smithson, Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, Reyner Banham, and J.B. Jackson thrust the banal, ugly, and haphazard industrial decay of the present moment into everyday consciousness. The New Topographics manifested a complex celebration of land's re-shaping as contemporaneous to social change and not as a nostalgic longing for the past.[326] They help me to ask: what are the new signs of the cultural landscape?

323 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 312.

324 John Beck, "The Purloined Landscape: Photography and Power in the American West," *Tate Papers*, no. 21 (Spring 2014), accessed March 17, 2024, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/21/the-purloined-landscape-photography-and-power-in-the-american-west.

325 Beck, "The Purloined Landscape."

326 Wilson, "Photography and Cultural Landscape Studies," 63.

Especially in the wake of logistics, which has pulverized land, severed cities from the hinterland, developed abstract and inchoate architectural forms, and emptied these spaces of people, what possible photographic forms can address these configurations? The New Topographics offer a partial answer, yet I am left with wanting more.

3.4 A SHORT SURVEY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEYS

This section details a series of landscape photography precedents, highlighting the genre's informational role. I first provide a short historical overview, and I then introduce France's particular usage of the photographic "mission." Before diving in, it's important to note that there is no definite consensus of what a photographic mission is. However, I consider a mission — or in French, an *observatoire* — as a project or initiative where photography is used as a primary tool to document, convey, and disseminate information on certain subjects or themes. Often, missions follow a prescribed set of objectives or methodologies and arise out of a larger, bureaucratic formation that structures their photographic output. As such, institutional goals are frequently prioritized over any artistic concern of individual photographers. This is how I define "mission" for the remainder of this dissertation.

From its very origins, photography has been instrumental in town planning and urbanism. In 1868, the French photographer known as Nadar, one of the first to use a hot air balloon to create aerial photographs, was solicited to produce a land registry of Paris's grand boulevards using his patented aerial survey technique.[327] Across the Atlantic, the U.S. Geological Survey and similar missions contemporaneously employed photography to survey and prospect the American West. These photographs depicted the region as an unclaimed frontier, justifying Manifest Destiny for the large-scale displacement of Indigenous peoples.[328] Concurrently, the photographs of Carlton Watkins helped influence the creation of America's National Park system, arousing the public to view Nature as an iconic landscape, not just a place.[329] Following Watkins, William Henry Jackson's photographs promoted conservation policy with the establishment of Yellowstone Park in 1872; Ansel Adams and his cohort arrived in the 1930s to expand on such initiatives. Photography in the late 19th century was also frequently used as an assistant in the expansion of the North American railroad, helping to transform land into property.[330] This smattering of photographic practices related to engineering, land development, and expansion date back nearly to photography's foundation. Consider France's École nationale des ponts et chaussées (National School of Bridges and Roads), which in 1859 introduced a course on photographic processes for the engineers of the *Service de restauration des terrains de montage* (Service for the Restoration of Mountainous Terrain), some of the first specialists to use photographic methods in their fieldwork.[331]

In the English-speaking world, the most commonly referenced photographic mission devised through institutional authority is probably the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Established in 1937, the FSA was a byproduct of

327 Kim Sichel and Denis Cosgrove have each written on Nadar and aerial photography as a bureaucratic instrument. See: Kim Sichel, "Deadpan Geometries: Mapping, Aerial Photography, and the American Landscape," in *Reframing the New Topographics*, *eds.* Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), 95. See also: Denis Cosgrove and William L. Fox, *Photography and Flight* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 25.

328 Photography played a keen role in Manifest Destiny, helping to shape the perception of the West as empty, a void waiting to be inhabited by a "civilizing force." See: Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

329 Frédéric Pousin, "Milestones for an Intercultural Approach," in *Photoscapes: The Nexus between Photography and Landscape Design*, ed. Frédéric Pousin (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019), 9.

330 Greg Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere: New Topographics and Art of the 1970s," in *Reframing the New Topographics*, *eds.* Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), 54-55.

331 Raphaële Bertho, "1994: A Decade of Photographic Missions in Town and Country Planning Institutions," in *Photoscapes: The Nexus between Photography and Landscape Design*, ed. Frédéric Pousin (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019), 38.

President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, a series of federal government programs and reforms focused on economic recovery, job creation, and the establishment of social safety nets in the midst of the Great Depression. The portion of the FSA relevant for this research is the photography program of the FSA's Information Division (later renamed the Office of War Information) that ran from 1935 until its closure in 1944. Initiated by Roy Stryker, this division featured notable photographers like Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Russell Lee, Gordon Parks, and others.[332] A distant successor to the FSA was a series of unfortunately short-lived photographic surveys commissioned by the American National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) between 1976 and 1982. The NEA surveys linked photographers to local institutions to produce territorial representations informed by social and historical issues, functioning as a hybrid between visual sociology and documentary practice intersecting with contemporary landscape questions.[333] This section, however, only introduces the FSA and NEA photography surveys as a common example to help establish the criteria for photographic missions as something peripheral to a standard practice.

In Europe, French photography curator Frédéric Pousin details a whole series of photographic missions commissioned in the 1980s and 1990s in his 2019 publication *Photoscapes: The Nexus between Photography and Landscape Design*.[334] For example, Sweden's *Ekodok-90* brought twenty-five photographers together to complete works on environmental issues over the four-year period of 1990 to 1994.[335] The Netherlands had a vigorous commissioning culture, with a slew of different government-led initiatives. The *Vinex Project*, commissioned by the *Rijksplanologische Dienst* (a division of the *Dutch Ministry of Housing, Town and Country Planning, and the Environment),* conducted surveys on the construction of new housing estates, revealing the necessity to build more homes.[336] Next door, neighbour Belgium proposed the *04° 50° La Mission photographique à Bruxelles.*[337] Newly reunited Germany brought photographers from the regions of the former-DDR for the *Fotografie und Gedächtnis* project that ran from 1992 to 1996, and a second project, *East*, photographed in 1992.[338] In Italy there was a thriving culture of institutional commissions, such as the *Viaggio in Italia* project, the *Archivio dello spazio*, commissioned by the province of Milan, and the still-ongoing *Linea di confine* in Emilia-Romagna.[339] These photographic missions did not stop at borders but also worked trans-nationally, like the *Mission transmanche* (1998–2005) and the *Cross Channel Photographic Mission* (1987–1994), whose purpose was to photograph the massive changes wrought by the "project of the century," the Channel Tunnel.[340]

But France is where these "*missions photographique*" seem to stick around and aren't just fleeting enterprises like some of the previous examples. France's missions go back nearly to the birth of photography, contributing significantly to the nation's cultural, urban, and rural landscape understanding, while proving a vital resource in the execution of various planning, preservation, and architectural policies. While the United States Geological Surveys and the aforementioned FSA are more famous and recognized, I choose instead a more contemporaneous — and marginalized — view of comparable photographic activity to my own, where the documentation of infrastructure and landscape in particular is vital. France has a long and varied history of positioning photography directly in relation to land issues in

332 Beverly Brannan and Gilles Mora, *FSA: The American Vision* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2006).

333 Mark Rice, "Through the Lens of the City: NEA Photography Surveys of the 1970s," *American Suburb X*, January 2012, accessed February 11, 2024, https://americansuburbx.com/2012/01/theory-through-lens-of-city-nea.html.

334 Pousin, "Milestones," 9.

335 "Landscapes Framed: European Photographic Missions, 1984-2019," exhibition at the ICO Museum, Madrid, Spain, accessed February 11, 2024, https://www.metalocus.es/en/news/landscapes-framed-european-photographic-missions-1984-2019-exhibition-ico-museum.

336 Frits Gierstberg, ed., *SubUrban Options: Photography Commissions and the Urbanization of the Landscape* (Rotterdam: Nederlands Foto Instituut, 1998).

337 Jacques Vilet et al., eds., *04°50°. La Mission photographique à Bruxelles* (Brussels: La Lettre Volée, 1991).

338 Bertho, "1994," 39.

339 William Guerrieri, "The Linea di Confine project," *History of Photography* 24, no. 3 (2000): 227-228.

340 Bertho, "1994," 38.

the institutional form of a mission. In this chapter, I detail three examples outlining different approaches to photographic activity spanning photography's expressive potential to its utterly bureaucratic form. Prior to launching into these examples, I focus first on a genealogical sketch to set the context for such missions.

3.5 MISSIONS FROM FRANCE

In 1851, the *Commission des monuments historiques* commissioned five photographers to document the country's urban and artistic heritage [Fig.20]. This famously came to be known as the *Mission héliographique*, with the objective to document France's architectural and historical legacy, particularly the medieval and renaissance buildings at risk of neglect or decay, such as the Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris's Musée Cluny, and the Hôtel de Ville (City Hall).[341] The photographs were used as aids in decisions regarding preservation and restoration in Paris's looming urban renewal that came to be known as Haussmannization, which saw significant urban reconfiguration to the city's layout. The *Mission héliographique* was one of the first instances of photography being used systematically, a foundational moment advocating for photography's topographical condition.[342] Photography's role in acts related to preservation was common at the turn of the 20th century, with various governmental departments initiating missions to defend specific sites — usually urban — from demolition or to look forward to maintain architectural heritage in future development. A notable example is the *Casier archéologique et artistique de Paris et du Département de la Seine* initiated by the *Commission historique du Vieux Paris* in the years from 1916 to 1928. Several thousand photographs were produced, documenting an array of old buildings and other urban complexes in the city that were under the threat of demolishment. Over these years, a photographic inventory compiled various urban complexes, landscapes, and individual buildings, assembling them into a legible format that could be used in the development of future plans for the continued expansion of Greater Paris, while striving to ensure the city would not annihilate its history so quickly.[343]

Meanwhile, another photographic enterprise echoes the systematic structure of these two missions, yet this one was the pursuit of an individual and was not tied to any administrative mandate. At the turn of the 20th century, French photographer Eugène Atget wandered the streets of Paris on a self-initiated photographic survey chronicling the city's transformation under rapid modernization, meticulously and industrially photographing a range of architectural heritage, from the vernacular and banal to the grand [Fig.21]. Atget's project was self-assigned; he sold his works to various outlets, from private collectors to municipal museums and institutions.[344] Although Atget worked independently, it was common in most projects to have technician-operators attached to specific institutions and government organizations, such as the *Eaux et Forêts* engineers of the *Service de restauration des terrains de montagne,* who for close to eighty years, between 1866 and 1940, were tasked with producing photographs intended solely for specialists of land management.[345] Similarly, engineering students at the

[Fig.20]

[Fig.21]

341 Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, eds., *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

342 Phyllis Lambert and Richard Pare, eds., *Photography and Architecture: 1839-1939* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1982).

343 Pousin, "Milestones," 10.

344 Laure Beaumont-Maillet, *Atget Paris* (Paris: Hazan, 1992).

345 Raphaële Bertho, "On Both Sides of the Ocean - The Photographic Discovering of the Everyday Landscape. Analyzing the Influence of the New Topographics on the Mission photographique de la DATAR," *Depth of Field* 7, no.1 (December 2015), accessed February 14, 2024, https://depthofield.universiteitleiden.nl/0701a03/.

École *nationale des ponts et chaussées* were obliged to take a photography course, tasked with the documentation of construction sites and engineering structures.[346] By the latter half of the 20th century, many governmental agencies used photography to advocate for their respective land-use initiatives.[347] The historical sketch presented so far is indicative of the varying kinds of state-level governmental institutions that commissioned photography in France. Each of these missions marks a cultural approach to landscape, highlighting its representational capacity to effect a different kind of perception that reflected the contemporary spatial moment.

Now, I will highlight in more detail three separate examples of more modern usage of the photographic mission in France. While they are not intended to act as models for my own practice, they do align with my interest in how an administrative understanding of landscape photography proposes a different relationship to land and its uses. I argue that these initiatives are less centred on external observation and instead localize human activity within the natural environment, designed to reveal social values and histories, reflecting the everyday, as J.B. Jackson states, as much as the monumental.[348]

All three examples meet at the intersection of landscape, photography, and public policy. *DATAR* (Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action régionale) initiated in the 1980s — and probably the most well known of the examples — aimed to elevate the French landscape as a development project utilizing artistic documentary methods, embodying the tension between artistic pretension and bureaucratic imperative. The second example, the *Conservatoire du littoral*, focused on shoreline preservation, and leveraged landscape photography's formal values to successfully garner governmental and public support. The final example, the *Observatoire photographique national du paysage*, established in 1989, took a regulated approach, situating photography as a documentary medium that could influence landscape policy, blending artistic vision with explicit bureaucratic objectives.

3.6 LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY BETWEEN ART AND ADMINISTRATION: DATAR

DATAR was a governmental institution founded in France in 1963 and was responsible for implementing regional development policies on a national scale by addressing economic imbalances and promoting regional equality.[349] In 1984, it launched a series of a photographic missions by commissioning various photographers to document the French landscape, including all points between urban and rural [Fig.22]. *DATAR* had a twofold purpose: to document landscape's rapid change under modernization and to elevate the genre of landscape photography into an art form. French photography historian Raphaële Bertho claims *DATAR* aimed to establish a model of public action that allowed institutions to manage the landscape's interests and to support artistic recognition of photography by integrating it into the art world.[350] Compounding these two directives, *DATAR's* founders insisted that only photographers were capable of creating "landscape culture."[351] They desired to liberate the photograph from its instrumental

346 Bertho, "1994," 38.

347 Bertho, "1994," 47.

348 J.B. Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). See also: Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*.

349 Bertho, "On Both Sides."

350 Bertho, "On Both Sides."

351 Patrick Roegiers, interviewed by Bernard Latarjet, "Douce France," *Révolution*, no. 266 (April 5-11, 1985): 40, quoted in Bertho, "1994," 38.

[Fig.22]

status, instead proposing to embrace the medium's expressive form to "approach town and country planning issues in cultural terms and no longer simply from administrative and technical standpoints," which had been the dominant mode for decades.[352] However, while a significant goal for *DATAR's* organizers was to fully introduce the landscape genre into the fine art world, it was still very much an institutional project. This seems at the very outset to entail an inherent contradiction: On the one hand, as Bertho states, there was a demand for "public action," addressing the conceptual and physical shaping of French society, while on the other hand, there was an expectation for photography to operate outside these utilitarian limits and produce rarefied objects.[353]

I evaluate the *DATAR* mission as a semi-failure because it sought to align itself with photography's status as an artistic medium, while still subjugated to institutional and administrative demands that could not accept, or at minimum could not understand, why this compulsion to equate photography as artistic was necessary. This failure is echoed by one of *DATAR's* founders, Bernard Latarjet, who proclaimed that positioning photography's expressive qualities as an action to challenge or valourize regional town planning policies did not really work. His "confidence that art could clarify policies, or change them, was excessive," noting that as a fulcrum between planners, elected officials, and the public, landscape photography as an artistic practice was insufficient to bridge an administration whose primary concern was information, not expression.[354]

I view their failure as expecting too much from photography's expressive power while not valuing the potential of photography as document or information. While a binary choice is unnecessary, designating a communicative role to photography can embrace its institutional value and not undermine its subjective positioning. Another issue that Latarjet rightly identifies in *DATAR's* long-term instability was the collision of the differing objectives of their funding model, with competing demands between non-artistic and artistic funders, rendering *DATAR's* structure unsustainable. One reason for this lack of sustainability, Bertho claims, was that each of the sub-departments within the organization had their own discrete photographic archive and did not acquire the means and knowledge to manage it effectively, such as through the implementation of adequate procedures for management, retrieval, and storage. Eventually, *DATAR's* mission was exhausted, and by 1988, its archive was deposited to the *Bibliothèque nationale de France.*[355] This was not just *DATAR's* fate, but the fate of other contemporaneous missions that also found their archives relegated to similar cultural institutions. Once the photographs exited their bureaucratic home, they were no longer considered valid for informational purposes and instead were judged as historical relics within a cultural — not administrative — framework.[356] *DATAR's* photography went from functioning as a central ingredient in the formation of a cultural landscape, used as aids in town planning and other urban development issues, to ending up as a collection of landscape photographs whose sole use was admiration. That is, the photographs were no longer reflections of a society now or in the future, but demoted to memories of the past, to paraphrase the French philosopher of photography Roland Barthes, that-has-been.[357]

352 Roegiers, "Douce France," 40, quoted in Bertho, "1994," 38.

353 Bertho, "On Both Sides."

354 Bertho, "1994," 50.

355 Bertho, "1994," 50.

356 Bertho, "1994," 50.

357 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 77.

DATAR's transition from a land-use policy program into a cultural archive, along with the elevated expectations for photography, resonates with American art historian Rosalind Krauss's conception of photography's discursive spaces. Her ideas, articulated as "views" or "landscapes," offer a helpful lens to examine *DATAR's* photographic approach and founder Latarjet's subsequent admission of failure.[358] In Bureau Mission Two, I go into detail regarding Krauss's views and landscapes, but for now, her theories prove valuable to understand where, and how, *DATAR* went wrong, offering some guidance to my practice moving forward. Before I proceed, I will briefly introduce Krauss's conception of discursive spaces. Krauss defines discursive space in the context of photography as the environment or framework where photos are created, interpreted, and circulated. These spaces encompass various systems of knowledge, language, and power, all of which contribute to the production and reception of the photograph. Utilizing the example of a photograph from American survey photographer Timothy O'Sullivan, she examines how expressive, scientific, and exhibition discursive space influences the meaning of the photograph. Krauss argues that a photograph can either be a "view," a topographical record aligned with utilitarian usage such as in mapping or cataloging various land uses and typically associated with scientific or governmental projects, or a "landscape," a photograph of transcendence and sublimity, filled with symbolic and cultural significance.[359]

DATAR produced both views and landscapes, yet they did not grasp the complexity of their desired discursive spaces and how various actors might interpret the photography, suggesting a tension between the functional and the expressive. On the one hand, *DATAR* expected the "landscapes" to reflect cultural and expressive values, while on the other hand, the photographs were positioned in a discursive space of institutional and administrative "views." In such a muddled configuration, potential for confusion in terms of the photographs's purpose and interpretation is strong. If photography, as Krauss argues, is a discursive medium — that is, tied to an inherent ability to communicate and construct knowledge — then the context of an photograph's production, circulation, and presentation are as vital as the photo itself.[360] In my view, the failure Latarjet acknowledges stems from this discursive shift, where artistic and cultural connotations became cross-contaminated amid a specific demand from the broader sponsoring institutions. *DATAR's* sponsors desired a photograph primarily for its functional usage, rather than its leaders' additional objective of elevating the landscape photograph's status to art object, carrying with it cultural and symbolically charged meaning. I imagine sessions where some photographs, conceived of as "landscapes" by the photographer, were instead assessed as functional, topographical views by administrators. Such misalignment of discursive space has obvious practical consequences, as the expressive qualities of a photograph could lead, for example, to a romanticized perception of land use, potentially affecting conservation efforts or other planning decisions — and, the inverse is true as well.

358 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 311-312.

359 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 313.

360 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 311-319.

3.7 MONUMENTALIZING THE COAST: THE CONSERVATOIRE DU LITTORAL

In a similar vein to *DATAR*, the *Conservatoire du littoral* was a governmental agency, founded in 1975, whose mandate was the preservation of France's coastal edges.[361] Their objective was much more operationally focused than *DATAR's*, and it was to utilize photography to promote the *Conservatoire's* initiatives amongst the public and to establish a collection of photographic works that documented efforts to protect coastal landscapes deemed exceptional by the government. A crucial difference between *DATAR* and the *Conservatoire* was the latter's emphasis on the coast's monumental aspects, rather than on the everyday and vernacular landscapes that preoccupied *DATAR* [Fig.23]. A commonality between the two organizations was that each considered photography as more than a topographical report; instead, photographs, in their organizer's eyes, were imbued with subjective and expressive force created by an author whose message could be instrumentalized for various inter-governmental advocacy and public campaigning.

The *Conservatoire* went a step further than *DATAR* by explicitly treating photography as an artistic and symbolic medium for a heritage-focused purpose. "Photography was not therefore used for its descriptive capacities," Bertho writes, "but as a format that offered a singular vision enhanced by an aesthetic quality. It was not a question of convincing through demonstration, but of gaining support through a form of sublimation."[362] The production of photography was meant to highlight for France's population how littoral landscapes are part of the nation's broader cultural and natural heritage, thus making these sites deserving of preservation and protection. The *Conservatoire* elevated the expressive values of a photograph in order to radiate a particular site's "atmosphere, a light, a substance,"[363] rather than simply relying on its topographic condition.

The *Conservatoire's* main distribution tactic was to build a photography collection that could be operationalized by the agency to the public at large and their civil service audience, which they felt would help them gain acceptance for its initiatives. They commissioned renowned photographers to leverage their skill to reveal the symbolic qualities of various coastal sites, underlining the mission for cultural and heritage preservation. By initiating such a collection, the *Conservatoire* fulfilled its iconographic needs but also monumentalized specific sites that aligned with the organization's littoral concerns. The collection — the sum of its individual photographs — is how the *Conservatoire* gained legitimacy. Consequently, the collection itself accrued valuable traction and social capital, proffering merit onto the *Conservatoire* and reinforcing their initiatives as valuable to French society.[364]

[Fig.23]

Another distinction of the *Conservatoire's* constitution was their funding structure. While an agency like *DATAR* would fund various projects upfront, the *Conservatoire* financed their photographic commissions through direct acquisitions of works produced by the photographers, similar to a patronage model. A benefit of this model for the photographer was that they could

361 Bertho, "1994," 39.

362 Bertho, "1994," 41.

363 Bertho, "1994," 41.

361 Bertho, "1994," 41.

work without any overbearing directive or obligation to administrative control. The collection[362] was used in a number of public campaigns, and it also gained traction as serious photography because of its inclusion in various prestigious photographic and cultural institutions, such as the *Rencontres internationales de la photographie* (the most significant photography festival in the world), as well as through its publication in two volumes.[363]

The *Conservatoire,* through its organizational approach and imbuement of its photography with cultural status, not only increased the visibility of its various actions deemed credible but effectively utilized the discursive space of the "landscape" — as Krauss would say, its "exhibitionality" — to exert a great effect. Priority was assigned to designating the collection with gravitas, thereby establishing the *Conservatoire's* message that the littoral landscape was a significant site of French heritage that required preservation. The collection's profile, now valourized in the country's interest because of this status, initiates the various works to be seen across an array of platforms, from prestigious galleries to publishing initiatives. Because the *Conservatoire* doubled down on the photographs's "exhibitionality" through the formation of a collection, this physical and conceptual framework suggests how these photographs will be perceived, raising the cultural value of the landscapes, the institution, and the photographers, rather than emphasis on land its varied uses. That is, its cultural status is elevated over the politics of land use.

3.8 DOCUMENTING THE EVERYDAY: OBSERVATOIRE PHOTOGRAPHIQUE NATIONAL DU PAYSAGE

The final example of a French mission is the *Observatoire photographique national du paysage* (*OPNP*), launched in 1989 under the auspices of the Ministry of the Environment's Landscape Bureau [Fig.24].[364] Like *DATAR* and the *Conservatoire du littoral*, they emphasized photographic authorship to help shape the policies, in this case, of town and country planning. Where the *OPNP's* approach differed, however, is in their marked shift in how they treated a photographer's artistic impulse and vision. *DATAR* and the *Conservatoire* cultivated creative freedom, while the *Observatoire* demanded strict adherence to a set of guidelines. Unlike *DATAR's* "right to fail," which accounted for the meanderings of a photographer in not just photographic approach but also in subject matter, the *Observatoire* worked primarily from recommendations established by a panel of experts who selected themes and territories for potential representation and monitored the progression of the photographic work.[365] The photographers were restricted to a set of pre-established geographic waypoints with an expectation of a set number of photographs to be produced yearly. This strict approach ensured that photography was always a prominent actor in landscape representation and policy, and not cast as simply illustrative. Because of this, photography held a dual status at the *OPNP* as both a transparent reflection of reality for the management of landscape policy that testifies to a site's specific conditions — its topographic state — and as serving as an artistic representation reflecting the subjectivity of the photographer and their relationship to a particular assigned region.[366] The photograph itself also held dual status as

362 Bertho, "1994," 41. Part of the collection can be viewed here: "La collection photographique," Conservatoire du littoral, accessed May 31, 2024, https://www.conservatoire-du-littoral.fr/45-la-collection-photographique.htm.

363 Bertho, "1994," 41.

364 Bertho, "1994," 48.

365 Bertho, "1994," 49.

366 Bertho, "1994," 49.

[Fig.24]

both an archival document that could be operationalized as a tool for communication and advocacy, and as a work of art.

The *Observatoire,* unlike the *Conservatoire,* considered the landscape not as something remarkable, but as something everyday. The distinction *OPNP* favoured was a phenomenological approach, embedding the observer in a particular landscape of a particular region. They shifted priority from visual representation of a landscape towards providing various experiences of place. With such an approach, the *OPNP* deemed representation as operational — that is, demonstrating the capacity for a photograph to engage with a public imaginatively — shifting the photograph's purposes from description to inscription. Landscape was not only a bastion of, for example, the sublime, but it was also a contemporary and relevant reflection of land shaped by human intervention, including the housing estates, factories, and commercial zones that exist concomitantly with the picturesque as something to not only be gazed upon but as spaces to be lived within. Theirs was a regional, and modest, approach to landscape, elevating recognizable landscape markers while paying attention to the transformations wrought by modernity, such as the previously mentioned suburban development and other vernacular signposts that under other circumstances would never belong in any heritage pantheon. The *Observatoire* sat at the crossroads of the vernacular which it valourized and public policy that sought to preserve the monumental.[367] Such a position is reminiscent of J.B. Jackson, who identified the contrasting portraits of landscape: the political or "official" landscape as managed by the State and the "vernacular," or everyday, usage-driven landscapes.[368]

3.9 MISSION COMPLETE

To conclude this section on the French missions, we see that what unites these various government entities beyond their bureaucratic formation — the *Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action r*égionale *(DATAR)*, the *Conservatoire du littoral, and the Observatoire photographique national du paysage (OPNP)* — was the desire, according to Bertho, to explore beyond the fact of a photograph, and instead to manifest those facts with symbolic order.[369] Each organization wanted to elevate the photograph's indexical status from an anonymous, instrumental object that reflected the world as it is, to a work of art. They claimed a new role for the photographer, who was known in France as a "*photoreportage d'auteur*" — an author whose singular vision elevates geography into a vision of and for landscape.[370] The *auteur* came from outside bureaucracy and brought with them a heightened profile to assist the photograph's transcendence from a marker of institutional utility into an inspired vision for a newly conceived landscape imagination. One tactic, utilized to varying success, was designating a body of work as a collection. As such, the collection acquired value as an artistic object by its association with specific discursive spaces, meaning these auteur-driven photographs could valourize territory and not just create heritage and preservation opportunities, but also elevate the status of the everyday as necessary for care and attention, as most effectively demonstrated

367 Bertho, "1994," 49.

368 Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape.*

369 Bertho, "1994," 48.

370 Bertho, "1994," 48.

by the *OPNP*. However, in my view, this transfer of photographic work from the initial, government-sponsored commissioning body to its consignment as a collection held by various cultural institutions overpowered the work's subject matter, demoting land use to a byproduct of authorial vision. Photography's expressive consideration outmaneuvers its topographical condition. As Rosalind Krauss has argued, when landscape as a photographic genre steeped in documentation is appropriated by the artistic world of photography, concerns for landscape eventually erode in favour of the advancement of photographic convention and expression.[371]

371 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 311-319.

372 Timothy Davis, "Filling in the Picture: A Broader Perspective on National Park Photography," in *Photoscapes: The Nexus between Photography and Landscape Design*, ed. Frédéric Pousin (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019), 15.

To me, such artistic elevation is only one facet of the missions, outweighed by how these agencies managed to position photography at the intersection of public policy and landscape perception. Each example had an ambitious vision for photography, interlocking artistic output in concert with bureaucratic structure to address town planning concerns — which is relevant for my own practice. My curiosity rests in these agencies's achievement of situating photography right in the thick of public policy, preservation, and landscape issues. I am satisfied with my position as an operator, even as an anonymous technician. Success, for me, is not just in recognizing the already well-cited monumental landscape but is also in elevating the vernacular as everyday within the official by affirming its importance in the wider context of landscape policy and perception. Now that I have explored the role of photography entangled within competing demands for bureaucratic and artistic necessity, I leave the continent of Europe and head to the United States for a more overt example of how landscape photography can be practiced (semi-)anonymously and within an administrative framework to address landscape as experience.

3.10 INSPECTOR: THE NATIONAL PARK PHOTOGRAPHER

Transitioning from the French photographic missions to the National Park Service (NPS) in the United States, the remainder of this chapter now prioritizes a specific group of photographers who have historically served — and continue to serve — as governmental or commercial representatives. In this section, I am interested in various collaborations — formal and informal, official and popular —between government officials, agencies, and commercial interests that all relied on photography to cultivate support for various policies, and to exert influence and ensure the Park's own existence as a symbol of American ideals.[372] At the conclusion of this chapter, I introduce the career of George Grant, the first official photographer for the National Parks Service, whose pragmatic approach to photography was overshadowed by that of his contemporary Ansel Adams. However, I argue that Grant is exemplary of landscape photography's bureaucratic potential, smartly addressing the genre's tendency towards elevated views while meeting the demands of administrative documentation.

First, the National Park Service is a federal agency established in 1916 that manages and preserves a network of national parks across the United States, including monuments and other historical sites. The NPS declares

their mission to protect the ecological and historical integrity of these places while ensuring public access.[373] They play a crucial role in interpreting these landscapes for public consumption, a kind of curation that shapes public perception of not just natural and historical sites, but of American identity, too. In this capacity, the NPS is a vital organ in the preservation of (official) American values through its nurturing and management of the nation's physical and cultural landscape.[374] Accordingly, landscape photography pays a pivotal role in reinforcing the Park's existence as a symbol of American ideals.[375]

National Park photography is a well-studied genre.[376] For example, Carleton Watkins, William Henry Jackson, and Ansel Adams's photographs have all been rightfully acclaimed.[377] However, my attention is on the treatment of photography as a bureaucratic medium, undertaken mostly by anonymized or little-known (or cherished) practitioners, such as George Grant. My priority here is to shift focus from celebrating the pioneering efforts of iconic photographers to an examination of marginal practices that eschews the monumental in favour of those practices that foreground the nearly, or adjacently, banal. In my view, the administrative is a viable form and format of photography that contributes to landscape perception outside the construction of the sublime. In the formative era of the National Park Service, a photographer was frequently expected to fulfill a dual purpose: first, to produce documents to distribute across various platforms and for divergent needs (such as bureaucratic reports covering the documentation of necessary infrastructural projects, like roadways, campgrounds, and tourist locations, or the provision of visual documentation for ecological assessment reports) [Fig.25];[378] and second, to generate expansive views of wilderness, used to elevate the Park into a symbol and expression of identity [Fig.26].[379]

In looking at archival imagery of the NPS, the incredible assortment of photographs is astonishing and attests to the Service's goals of wilderness conservation, land-use policy, and the construction of an iconic American landscape. Road works are interspersed with tourists happily smiling for the camera, and bridge works and sewage construction commingle neatly with scientific photographs and scenic tableaux. What is present is the instrumental photograph amidst its artistic cousin. As records, the photographs are ordinary and necessary, not so dissimilar to the telephone poles, electrical substations, manhole covers, and other infrastructural systems that make up space and place as much as their more admired counterparts.[380] Take one photograph from this archive as a sampling [Fig.27]. Its digital caption reads: "Scenery – New cleaned area beside a turn in Cadillac Mt. Road. This is to be a park. Negative #: 4441. Locality: Acadia National Park." The date is 1934. It is a pretty banal photograph of a road slicing through a flat plain littered with pine trees; along the road's edge, what appears to be scrub, tagged with two other keywords: construction, road. There is no indication of the photographer. And this is how to conceive of the NPS photographer — as "conceptual infrastructure," integral to the Park's administration and management while also playing a role in the production of national identity and values.[381]

In the earliest days of the Parks Service, it was commercial photographers who played a key role, used primarily in service of promotional purposes.

373 "About Us," National Park Service, accessed May 5, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm.

374 "Case Study: Harpers Ferry National Historical Park," *The Lay of the Land: The Center for Land Use Interpretation Newsletter*, no. 47 (Winter 2024).

375 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 15.

376 For a general overall survey of the entirety of the National Parks Service and its relation to the formation of an American landscape, see: William H. Truettner, *National Parks and the American Landscape* (Washington, DC: National Collection of Fine Arts / Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972). And: Nancy K. Anderson, "'The Kiss of Enterprise': The Western Landscape as Symbol and Resource," in *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier*, ed. William H. Truettner (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Museum of American Art, 1991), 239-240.

[Fig.25]

[Fig.26]

[Fig.27]

Their photographs supported NPS-adjacent enterprises such as railroads, media, and the documentation of capital improvements, driving tourism, all the while helping to shape the park into a national icon in the public's imagination.[382] These photographers occupied a liminal position. Not officially sanctioned, they served dual roles as unofficial promoters and stewards of the parks's visual culture and history, while sustaining business and cultural preservation. Their intention was the production of commodifiable artifacts meant for wide distribution over any artistic expression.[383] As American art historian Timothy Davis recounts, "Not only did their mercantile orientation detract from efforts to define photography as a fine art, but they exhibited little enthusiasm for the soft-focused fancies of the contemporary photographic avant-garde."[384] I find this tradition relevant, as it speaks to my own interest in how landscape photographs become part of, and reflect, the everyday. For the early park photographers, the priority was to produce relevance for a broad public, rather than catering to the tastes of an exclusive audience. There is charm in these endeavours, a mercantile reorientation towards the everyday. Here, photography as an administrative practice exists outside its institutionalized form (as in museums, galleries, and festivals) and adheres to its origins as a highly reproducible medium to reach a medley of audiences across multiple platforms. The early commercial photographers of the National Park system shaped a photographic model that exists beyond the production of a "pictorialized" singular view, and is instead in favour of landscape as an experience.[385]

The rise of the National Park Service cannot exist outside the invention of reproductive technologies that enabled its consideration as distant land into an iconographic image in the public imagination. Production of imagery was vital, but ensuing distribution methods enabled the NPS to worm its way into the public's everyday consciousness. An early example was the production of small booklets devised by park officials containing a combination of photograph and text that highlighted concerns and issues relevant to the NPS, with the intention that these booklets would be easily exchanged and distributed amongst the populace [Fig.28]. These would be sent off to women's clubs, politicians, chambers of commerce, and other professional organizations to shore up support for various NPS initiatives.[386] In addition, an educational arm enabled the Service to disseminate its vast production of photography to all kinds of outlets, such as temporary exhibitions, publication companies for inclusion in textbooks, and other platforms that all had a thirst for National Parks Service imagery. The NPS's next step in visual dissemination was to agglomerate the parks's output into a photographic library that could be loaned out to schools, churches, and other social groups for educational purposes. These various methods successfully leveraged photography's distributive capacity to circulate, actively supporting the burgeoning NPS mission by implicitly rather than explicitly conveying the sensibility of an American ideal.

In 1918, Herbert Gleason was the first to become classified as an "inspector" with the National Parks Service. Part of his newly invented role was the photographic documentation and surveying of potential sites for further expansion, while at other times he functioned as a political agent. As an inspector, not a photographer, Gleason was expected to fulfill the printing of photographs as evidence, and to produce photographs and other visual

377 On Carlteon Watkins, see: Peter E. Palmquist, *Carleton E. Watkins: Photographer of the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983); Tyler Green, *Carleton Watkins: Making the West American* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018). On William Henry Jackson, see: Laurie Lawlor, *Window on the West: The Frontier Photography of William Henry Jackson* (New York: Holiday House, 1999). On Ansel Adams, see: Jonathan Spaulding, *Ansel Adams and the American Landscape: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

378 On the architecture, landscape design, and infrastructure development of the National Parks, see: Ethan Carr, *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Linda Flint McClelland, *Building the National Parks: Historic Landscape Design and Construction* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Timothy Davis, *National Park Roads: A Legacy in the American Landscape* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

379 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 29.

380 "History Photo Collection," National Park Service, accessed February 14, 2024, https://npgallery.nps.gov/HFC/History/.

381 Davis, "Filling in the Picture,"

382 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 17.

383 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 15.

384 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 15.

385 Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 58-59.

386 Davis, "Filling in the Picture,"

[Fig.28]

supplements that would assist in securing increased support for a variety of measures planned by the NPS.[387] In this era, photography was considered an informational medium used for communication, far removed from artistic expression [Fig.29].

Photography not only fuelled the expansion of the Parks Service by satiating the public's hunger for wilderness imagery, but it also captured society's rapid change spurred by industrialization, no small part of which involved the automobile. As mobility increased, so too did the expansion and transformation of the NPS. Photography proved fundamental in shaping public perception and in managing the landscape as it expanded to include this newfound mobile relationship that would change how a park was viewed forever.[388] With demand from tourists rising, the Parks Service expanded the remit of the inspector. Suddenly, there was a yearning for photographs of capital expansion and improvements; lobbying Congress for extra funds required visual aids; magazines and the illustrated press sought more and more representations of the parks; and conservation agencies necessitated the accumulation of inspiring photography. More than just inspectors were needed — it was now necessary to employ photographers. In 1929, George Alexander Grant took up this role, becoming the first official Photographer for the National Parks Service.[389]

3.11 THE FIRST "OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHER": GEORGE GRANT

Known throughout much of his tenure as simply "National Parks Service Photographer," Grant was given the position after years of toiling away in various tasks and positions within the NPS.[390] While certainly not a photographic rube, Grant was content to fulfill the NPS's bureaucratic vision rather than advancing landscape conventions like his much more famous counterpart, and successor, Ansel Adams. Yet, for me, Grant is a more compelling character than Adams (whom I will also address shortly). As an employee, Grant was obliged to produce all kinds of photographic records, from technical images for scientific publications to expressive photography used in various exhibitions and presentations, balancing between the creation of instrumental photographs and embracing photography's cultural potential [Fig.30, 31]. Grant would travel throughout the summer months to various parks, photographing landscapes, capital improvements, and tourist activities, at the same time adhering to the technical demands of the NPS's scientific divisions.[391] Using a 5x7" field camera affixed with a wide angle lens, not so dissimilar to my own camera (except, of course, the translation from analogue to digital), Grant produced a compelling and astonishing array of subject matter, which is now all catalogued and logged into the Parks Service's photography library: historic sites and buildings, assorted park holdings, group portraits, infrastructure developments, and, of course, the ubiquitous landscape photographs admiring the park's bountiful scenery.[392]

For example, on one search page alone, I came across the following inventory: reproduction of an archeological document; a photograph of what looks to be a construction site at Big Bend National Park; an architectural

[Fig.29]

[Fig.30]

[Fig.31]

387 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 26.

388 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 27.

389 Ren Davis and Helen Davis, "Landscapes for the People," *National Parks* (National Parks Conservation Association), Fall 2015, accessed March 17, 2024, https://www.npca.org/articles/478-landscapes-for-the-people.

390 Davis and Davis, "Landscapes for the People."

391 He travelled more than 140,000 miles producing 30,000 images over his NPS career. See: Davis and Davis, "Landscapes for the People."

392 Grant's archive can be accessed here: "History Photo Collection," National Park Service, accessed February 14, 2024, https://npgallery.nps.gov/HFC/History/.

photo of a wall and gate; a group portrait of NPS employees and directors; and a landscape photograph of the Canyon de Chelly monument in Arizona (which also happens to be one of Ansel Adams's most celebrated photographs: *View from River Valley, "Canyon de Chelly" National Monument, Arizona*) [Fig.32]. Comparing Grant's photograph of this iconic site with Adams's, you can see how Grant eschewed the soaring compositions and high tonal contrast of Adams's [Fig.33].[393] Grant's photo is more prosaic, literally centring the monument itself in the frame, almost downplaying the dramatic grandeur of the location that Adams so keenly elevates. Meanwhile, Adams places the monument — a collection of houses constructed of mud appearing as if they are carved from the rock face — in the bottom third (recall from Bureau Mission One that good landscape tradition follows the rule of thirds), with the striated lines and topographical inscription sweeping upwards in an ascending composition, as if this Navajo site was not of this world, but alien — also a signal of the sublime. While much more could be written on this point, I move on to include other aspects of Grant's practice. However, one final note that resonated for me when searching out these photographs online was that Grant's photograph is hardly available; there is nothing more than a low-resolution jpeg, a paltry 21kb in total, barely more than a thumbnail. Adams's, on the other hand, has hundreds of downloadable (competing) versions. The photograph accessible from the Library of Congress is offered at different resolutions, with its highest being a resounding 3,000 pixels at its longest, meaning that anyone can easily make a small print.[394]

Grant was prolific, with his output appearing in numerous NPS publications, disseminated to mass media, adorning the walls of congressional offices, and of course, recreated as tourist souvenirs.[395] Yet he apparently lacked a desire for any kind of art world acclaim even though his work achieved monumental scope because of the breadth of its distribution networks.[396] The paradox of his work is that it is unrecognized, yet through the sheer force of the NPS, he contributed an immense historical visual record and firmly established the role of the national park as a central component to everyday American life and identity. His work transcended the depiction of wilderness as a pristine and idealized representation of American identity and also included extensive documentation of the Parks's infrastructural and physical improvements, enabling Grant to balance artistic expression with bureaucratic necessity to construct an iconic landscape. Grant's photographs, while bypassing any demand to be admired as photographic objects (although they obviously fulfilled this role), were primarily intended as a bureaucratic catalogue of Park activity, and as tools to assist in the shaping of land as a space of enjoyment and signifier of American values.

A century since he began his sojourn as the inaugural official Parks photographer, Grant's work is exemplary of how photography actively sculpts perception, underscoring that landscape production is as much a conceptual process as it is a physical one.[397] Grant is a fascinating model, demonstrating that it is not always the production of rarefied photographs that holds value, but sometimes the ability to connect and communicate across a broad public using a multiplicity of methods. Grant foreshadows my conception for a landscape photography to function as a kind of service apparatus that mediates the various relations between humans and their environment, while documenting these complexities with skill and care.[398]

393 Timothy O'Sullivan also photographed the same location in 1873. See: Timothy H. O'Sullivan, *Ancient Ruins in the Cañon de Chelle, N.M. (No. 11, Geographical Explorations and Surveys West of the 100th Meridian)*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, accessed May 31, 2024, https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/ancient-ruins-canon-de-chelle-nm-no-11-geographical-explorations-and-surveys-west-100th. Nearly a century and a half later, artist and photographer Trevor Paglen photographed the same location to extend the lineage into the contemporary moment. See: Brooke Belisle, "Artifacts," in *Making the Geologic Now: Responses to Material Conditions of Contemporary Life*, eds. Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2012).

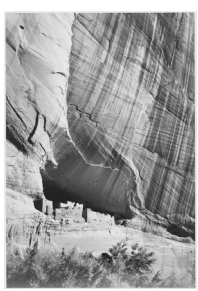
394 Ansel Adams, *View from River Valley, 'Canyon de Chelly' National Monument, Arizona*, Library of Congress, accessed May 31, 2024, https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_02721/?r=-0.536,-0.04,2.072,1.603,0.

395 Davis and Davis, "Landscapes for the People."

396 Davis and Davis, "Landscapes for the People."

397 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 35.

398 Mark Sawyer, *Early Days: Photographer George Alexander Grant and the Western National Parks* (Flagstaff: Northland Press, 1986).



[Fig.32]

[Fig.33]

Eventually, the NPS expanded so extensively that a single photographer could never fulfill the demands of the job. This expansion set the stage for Ansel Adams's entry in 1936, cleaving the Parks Service's photographic values in half: on one side, Grant's bureaucratic mission, and on the other side, Adams's desire to advance the formal and ideological dimensions of landscape photography to better reflect his specific conservation priorities. Adams, unlike Grant, was allowed the freedom to shape his visions. The photographs of Ansel Adams during this period established his subjective and political views, erasing from view anything that he felt would distract from an imaginary conception of Nature and American ideals.[399] Meanwhile, Grant was obliged to literally clutter his frame with the various sullied actions of tourists, overlooks, camp sites, visitor centres, sewage infrastructure, and the like. This divergence in approach — Adams's artistic appetite versus Grant's adherence to bureaucratic directives — sparks a further exploration of what I frame as their temporal split.

399 Jonathan Spaulding, *Ansel Adams and the American Landscape: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

400 Spaulding, *Ansel Adams*.

401 Spaulding, *Ansel Adams*.

402 Foster-Rice and Rohrbach, *Reframing the New Topographics*.

403 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 35.

3.12 ANSEL ADAMS AND GEORGE GRANT: A TEMPORAL SPLIT

Adams experimented wildly with form and expression, playing with cloud form and cropping, and positioning landmarks in specific ways to reorder and construct an image of American values reflected in Nature.[400] However, I find Grant's work to be more engaging, as he was subordinated to the demands of his administrative superiors, producing a more likely, and, paradoxically, sustainable image of the national park as a human–nature conflagration, and not as something as distant and distilled as Adams's works suggest. Grant's dedication to capturing the complexity of the national park — a bastion of science, survey, tourism, infrastructure, ideals, documentary, and iconography — stands in contrast to Adams, whose works are very much icons to his genius, infused with explicitly subjective political values to maintain the national park as unsullied.[401] Post WWII, their careers could not be more divergent: Adams secured himself as one of the 20th century's premier photographers in any genre, while Grant toiled mostly anonymously as an official photographer for the National Parks Service, and, later, for the Department of the Interior.

I consider this a temporal split in their careers and approaches, providing a lens through which to view the evolution of landscape photography within environmental and cultural narratives. Ansel Adams's perspective remains the dominant one, still resonant today, even in light of the efforts of the New Topographic photographers, who, I previously argued, set off to reframe the camera's view of Adams and his cohort to recapture all the debris they had so diligently erased.[402] For Adams and other conservation-aligned photographers like his contemporaries Minor White and Eliot Porter, depictions of wilderness were meant to remain unsullied, separating human interaction from land use, reserving Nature as an image to be admired from afar.[403] Grant's work aligns closely with the New Topographic photographers, yet in my view his true contemporary is found in the *Center for Land Use Interpretation* — a group I will write extensively about in Chapter 6 — at least in part because of his commitment to practicing photography as a topograph-

ic or informatics model, insisting that land be considered in all its ugly — and beautiful — detail, and accepting photography's inherent circulatory condition [Fig.34].

Grant and Adams produced evocative and compelling photography, yet for me, Grant's photographs best express the complexities of land and landscape as an intermingling of nature and culture. Grant's photos are what I would deem "topographic photographs" — a concept I introduce in the following Bureau Mission Two — that record a reality Adams could never represent. While they still conceptualize an (American) ideal, I find them to be rooted in physical conditions and not lofty sentiment. When cars and tourists and people enter Grant's frame, their livability draws us closer, which, according to Canadian environmental historian Finis Dunaway, creates a sustainable relationship to the everyday that is worthy of protection, "affirming the humane, pleasure-giving qualities of the contemporary landscape."[404] Adams created breathtaking photographs, yet I am still ruffled by his omission of human influence. This approach suggests a prioritization of (unreal) wilderness and Nature, unable to reflect the actual human-impacted reality of these sites. Grant's legacy proves fruitful for my own cause, which is reflective of the landscape as a social space, a living and breathing entity beyond the freezing of a single moment that can only ever exist as a photograph. Grant's work presents the park as socially appealing (even if some of his framing is haphazard), creating an accessible space that reflects the commingling role of human and nature as something that can never be separated, a kind of "half-wilderness that musters affection for the everyday."[405] His photographs, unlike Adams's, are human-produced, redolent of our world, rather than distant projections of an inviolate wilderness set in the sublime arena of exotic and contemplative beauty.[406]

404 Finis Dunaway, "Beyond Wilderness: Robert Adams, New Topographics, and the Aesthetics of Ecological Citizenship," in *Reframing the New Topographics, eds.* Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), 42.

405 Dunaway, "Beyond Wilderness," 42.

406 Davis, "Filling in the Picture," 35.

Grant's career informs my practice by indicating the importance of enticing the public to participate in nature, not just to contemplate it from afar. This is especially relevant to the Port of Rotterdam, akin to a national park, albeit on a much more depleted scale, where the landscape is often only viewed from a distance, forming a singular, naturalized image that can only ever be admired and accepted. Applying Grant's values to the logistical landscape creates an inviting view, promoting access, experience, and contemplation, not just of the sublime condition of the Port but also as a reckoning of space as everyday, livable, and shareable. Looking through Grant's extensive archive, he presented landscape as socially relatable and not as something to be awed at as an exclusive domain. This is imperative for my own work, forging a reminder that photography is as much about access, relatability, and performative condition as it is about representing a view.

Adams's photographs of nature and wilderness are emblematic of American identity; to contest his imagery means to contest that very identity. George Grant, because of his obligation to address a bounty of matters at the behest of his employer, the National Parks Service, creates an image that is not afraid of change, infusing his pictures with instrumental, communicative, and expressive needs. Grant's photography is temporal. A temporal photograph constantly navigates its circumstances, reflexive of its distributive context, and adapts to the consistent and persistent evolutions of land and landscape — indicative of Krauss's views and landscapes. Adams's photo-

[Fig.34]

graphs are atemporal; timeless records that transcend messy and cluttered human reality, and instead fix nature as something to be preserved, frozen in time. If in my own landscape photography practice I consider the Port to be a space of invitation, then I must also locate these spaces as specific to a time and place, allowing them to undergo change. To produce atemporal photographs sustains the logistical landscape as an enduring product of official conditions that avoids the complexities of everyday life. Such an image reinforces the official landscape's reluctance to be viewed, added to, or even changed through multiple gazes, and instead allows it to remain as an inevitable chunk of land that will never change.

This section ends at the moment Ansel Adams and his progeny would transform the national park into a total image, bringing expressive formalism to the park's understanding rather than its topographic reality.[407] While subjectivity, expression, and formal decisions will remain embedded in a photograph, an administrative view of photography highlights other aspects of a landscape, such as its contextual situation and its reflection of the site in an everyday capacity transmitted through various circulatory methods. The photographs by Grant and other (anonymous) National Park Service photographers serve as historical markers to model a photographic practice like mine that strives to make meaningful relationships within the logistical landscape. Such an approach centres the topography of site to ensure that the built environment resonates clearly to create a legible connection to our surroundings. This maneuver redirects attention from the perceived value of the photographs as icons of identity and photographic expression, to situating photography as an active participant in the transformation and understanding of landscape. The shift suggests that our connection with these environments can perpetuate if considered as shared and common (even prosaic) rather than outside and exotic.

407 Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 57.

3.13 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have presented an alternative history of landscape photography, repositioning it not just as an artistic form, but as an administrative medium acutely imbued with socio-political, bureaucratic, and cultural dimensions. This reformed trajectory begins with the influential New Topographic photographers, who reframed the conventions of landscape from representations of pristine and untouched wilderness to documents of a human-altered landscape, making them contingent and relevant to their time. However, I proposed an amicable divorce from their legacy, suggesting they adhered too closely to a modernist sensibility, that, in my view, isolates landscape photography from a broader, and more diverse, discursive space. To expand the discussion, I introduced the photographic missions common to France, which applied an administrative model to document landscapes with dual intentions: to influence public land-use policy and to elevate the cultural status of landscape photography. In these examples, I noted the inherent tensions between utilitarian purpose and artistic aspiration. Further, through an examination of the National Park Service and the career of George Grant, I demonstrated how landscape photography, when

considered bureaucratic and administrative, engages with the physical and cultural environment as something more than solely a reliance upon the finality of the photograph. Using this reconfigured lineage, I have formulated for landscape photography a potential that is temporal, reflective of social values and changes, and instrumental in achieving legibility. Building upon, yet deviating from, the legacies of the New Topographics, I articulate a path for my own practice that respects landscape photography's iconic status yet prioritizes the everyday in relation to the marginal, making it about influencing perception as much as it is about depicting landscape.

Across the first three chapters, I progressively expanded the notion of landscape. Starting from its etymological root, I demonstrated landscape's relation to shaping — physically and culturally — with particular emphasis on its economic origin. In Chapter 2, I developed a conceptual interlinking of "site and sight" to articulate landscape's dual condition: as a site of physical reality and as a sight for interpretation. I now conclude with a set of precedents that establishes, and expands, the field I operate in, constructing the foundation for the remaining three chapters, where I define my practice in response to the novel condition of the logistical landscape. Before moving to Chapter 4, Bureau Mission Two introduces a practice-led inquiry into what I term the "topographic photograph," a surface-driven approach that documents and analyzes the physical and bureaucratic characteristics of the logistical landscape. Bureau Mission Two serves as the fulcrum, transitioning from establishing landscape as a word, a concept, and now as a practice, to introducing the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes*, a practical and conceptual framework aimed to fully experience the logistical landscape.

PHOTO LOCATION #34

It's an early moment in my photographic sojourns into the Port, and I have yet to figure out what kind of picture I want to make and how. I've tried lots of options, but none of them make sense. On this day, it's October 25, 2020 (I know this because I checked the digital photograph's metadata that reveals all its inner workings). I am in a tiny little Volkswagen UP! (the ! is part of the car name; it's not a registration of my enthusiasm for it), puttering about the Port. I decide to continue with visiting some of the Port of Rotterdam's official photo locations; in recent weeks, I managed to photograph most of the 44 locations. Number 20: a view of the Nieuwe Maas and the village of Pernis; Number 21: a sort of equivalent to an air traffic control centre but for boats and ships. It looks pretty cool as a piece of architecture, so I take a few pictures of it. Slowly I move westward through the Port of Rotterdam, starting in the city centre and eventually concluding nearly sixty kilometres later in spectacular fashion. At photo location Number 23 is a lock so ships don't have to sail around the Rozenburg Landtong. It also has a pretty cool looking piece of architecture built in 1985. But I am not here to make an architectural survey of port infrastructure — although… no. But this day, I am impatient. I had been working methodically, moving incrementally towards the climax that is number 36 in Maasvlkate, but no pictures from any location proves interesting. I decide to jump ahead and visit my most anticipated number — 34, the Princess Amaliahaven. The Port Authority's digital map provides a photo, and it looks magnificent. Nestled right at the bottom of a channel, with a perfect equidistant view between two shipping terminals: on the western edge, Rotterdam World Gateway, where the world's largest container ships find berth — specifically, the Algeciras-class container ship owned and operated by the Korean company formerly known as Hyundai Merchant Marine, now branded as HMM. On its opposite shore along the eastern edge of Prinses Amaliahaven squats the APM-Moeller Maersk terminal, a Danish company that floats sky-blue ships.

I wanted to come visit location 34 — Rotterdam World Gateway in particular — because on June 3, 2020, the *HMM Algeciras* entered the Port of Rotterdam on its maiden voyage from the Korean shipyards that built it via the Chinese Port of Yantian. At that point, it was the world's largest container ship. The press release from the Port Authority rattled off a list of numbers: beam width, draft, height, weight, cargo-carrying capacity, and all other kinds of numbers. Officially, the *HMM Algeciras* can carry 23,964 TEUs — that stands for twenty-foot equivalent units, a standard measurement of the modern shipping industry. This beats the previous record-holder, the *MSC Gülsün*, which could only carry 23,756 TEU, losing by a mere margin of 108 containers. How annoyed must they have been?

On this day in June, however, the *Algeciras* is carrying 19,621 TEU. It's still a record, they want us to know. If the numbers don't mean anything, a ship like this is usually referred to in Empire State buildings or Eiffel Towers tall. Sometimes, football pitches are used or, in an attempt at being more relatable, reports of the ship's scale is pronounced by its equivalent height as similar to a twenty- or thirty-story building. That helps, a bit. When the *CMA CGM Benjamin Franklin* arrived at the Port of Los Angeles in 2016, the largest container ship to ever grace a North American port (at that time, this record has since fallen, too), a newspaper reporter referred to its size as "wide as 14 freeway lanes." A good example of knowing your audience.

I figured seeing these ships could be the picture I needed to get my photographic research fired up. I was juiced that day, excited at the anticipation of what could potentially unfold. I checked my ship-tracker app, and so knew that this ship was going to be there, amongst a few other incredible hulks. To get to photo location 34 takes a few attempts to get it right, even with Google Maps guiding you. Here are the directions heading west from the centre of Rotterdam, driving along the A15 which turns into the N15 at Oostvorne then sweeps in an S-curve from the north shore of the Hartlkanal to the southside (which is also the exit to the Shell gas station which, other than The Smickel Inn, is the only place to get a snack if you're hungry):

1) Use the right 2 lanes to take the exit toward Maasvlakteweg
2) Continue onto Maasvlakteweg (for 2.6 kms)
3) Slight right (500 m)
4) Turn right (500 m)
5) Continue onto Amoerweg (160 m)
6) At the roundabout, take the first exit. Destination will be on right.

Wrong. Wrong because what the Port had built in the time since Google's last cartographic update was not accurately reflected in the map. What the sample photograph showcases online as an example of this location is a wide vista, similar to an Old Dutch landscape painting with what looks to be a sandy shore on either side riddled with cranes split by a large body of water. As a photographer, this little JPEG produced an enticing sight, depicting an unobstructed view. I couldn't wait to make pictures there. Arrival — "you have reached your destination," followed up with disappointment. The photograph of location 34 posted on the Port Authority's website is old, outdated.

What I found was not even a crappy replica of that purported view. Instead, construction had created a mess of roads and security fencing. I decided to park my little Volkswagen on a small spit of land off to the side of Maasvlakteweg. I pulled

in and nestled amongst the construction outhouses, beaching my car upon some artificial sand that was being used to expand the territory of maritime possibility for bigger and bigger ships. I began to walk the zone. Piles of asphalt, weird agglomerations of sand, and other dusty particles. Facing the harbour, a chainlink fence, at least two meters tall, topped, of course, with barbed wire. I got out my extra-tall Gitzo tripod that extends to more than two meters in height; still not high enough to peer over this barrier. Stymied, I went searching for another vantage point. To the left, about 300 meters away, a customs checkpoint with various arrays of cellular towers and other communication devices poking vertically into the sky, sucking in electronic signals and wavelengths; a whole series of stoplights, constantly flashing different colours — but red, mostly. Occasionally, a blurting of horns and other signals, a woman's voice through an intercom shouting orders to the assembled truckers waiting their turn for inspection. A large, concrete pillbox with what looked to me like sniper slots but what really was just some kind of large external exhaust vent. Also, what looked to be, if I squinted enough, a large globe, seemingly manufactured out of titanium or some other kind of shiny metal inscribed with the continents of Earth; apropos for the entry to Rotterdam World Gateway. Circling this giant steel globe, a series of flags alternating between the corporate logo of RWG, and what looked like flags of nations, only to be discovered later as flags of DP World, the state-owned enterprise of Dubai Ports and parent company of RWG, a maritime menace taking control of port operations globally.

Signs everywhere: Visitors (probably that's not what they really meant, they weren't expecting someone like me); Employees; Workshop; Security; and something oddly called Problem Parking — that sign was bigger. Intriguing. Another big sign, this one emblazoned in all caps — WARNING. Proceed at your own risk, they cautioned; RWG does not take any liability for your potential demise, the sign then listing a whole variety of potential deaths that could occur in a container terminal, like being squashed from loading and unloading cargo, struck by vehicles, or even, God forbid, crushed by a rogue container dislodged from a ship, train, or truck. Intermodal death, indeed! They weren't responsible for what happens on land, nor on the water, nor in the air. Signed, The Management.

At just that moment of making a photograph, H. N. Post & Zonen (was it H. N. himself, or one of his sons?) came roaring past in a bright red transport truck, laden with an effervescent green EVERGREEN shipping container. In the window of the cockpit, a pair of hanging fuzzy dice dangled alongside a slogan taped to the windshield, which I could barely make out as something like: *Je kunt [?] altijd zests ge…* You can always… what!? What was that last word? I couldn't finish reading, because he blasted his horn: WHHHAAAMMMPPPPP!!! Again, a little shorter this time: WHHAAMMP! I scurried away. I shared this enigmatic sign

under further scrutiny with my Dutch friends; I presumed it had something to do with gambling because of the dice. By consensus (how Dutch) it was agreed that H.N. and/or his sons's sign said: *Je kunt niet altijd zes gooien (You can't always throw a six)*. Uh! Containers and their drivers! RO-RO roll on roll off!

I'm really in the wrong spot, it's impossible to make any kind of photo here. I make it back to the car, successfully dodging blackguard containers. I dislodge my car from the sand displaced from the seabed and realize where I am: trapped amongst the various frequencies of power and relegated to the periphery of the Port, pinned in by logistics and their bureaucratic functioning. Now, okay, I can make some photographs.

BUREAU MISSION TWO:

[02]

MIS

#02

THE TOPO-GRAPHIC PHOTO-GRAPH

#02

M
[1311]45
29:59
1/125
F11
AUTO

RATE
MENU
AF-ON
INFO
SET

Canon
EOS
R5
EOS R5

Canon

INTRODUCTION

After one of my photographic forays into the Port, I decided to print out every single photo I made over that specific span of eight shooting days. Granted, I printed them out before I really understood how many I had actually made: 14,617 photos chewing up 945.13 GB of data. Fortunately, I am employed by a university, so I exploited their graciousness and printed out these thousands of photos as contact sheets, each picture roughly 6x8 cm. I then cut them out, one by one, seemingly taking days. From there, I made piles, sifting them into different categories: location, time, date, subject matter, relevance, and so on. These little piles became huge piles, stacked up on my desk, on shelves, on the floor. I had created a kind of palace of paper, harassed and restrained by methods of modern administration, perhaps even teetering on the excessive.

Each individual piece of paper seemed to reveal something else that the surface of the landscape could only point towards; I realized I was compiling not just evidence of the Port, but the process of categorization revealed other insights that the photographs alone could not reveal. The act of sorting and sifting was like a metonymic reflection of the bureaucratic processes that parcel and organize land and data alike. My piles of paper brought the logistical landscape home, invading my workspace and provoking a different relationship to the landscape than the one I had previously known. That is, physical and material engagement with these photographs prompted me to comprehend how such landscapes are constructed — not just visually, as I had understood, but as accumulating layers of bureaucratic decisions that shape perception of space and its function. Standing back, gazing upon all these ridiculous piles, I saw bureaucratic form writ large on the photographic plane. I started to understand the photos as reports — actually, topographic reports — erased of any kind of authorial intention; they appeared as mirrors reflecting back the official or bureaucratic status of their origin point.

[Fig.35]

Emerging out of this practice-led research, I discovered that every one of these 14,617 photographs offered their own unique portal into the Port of Rotterdam. Such a number is redundant; what is not, however, is the possibility that each photograph materializes an infinite and detailed look into the layers of social, economic, and political relations that are embedded within the landscape. I paired each photograph with metadata from its capture, such as filename (e.g., DW-20230427-0173) and date (04-27-23) just below the picture as a kind of identifier. I saw these little appendages in 6-point font as revealing the conceptual underpinning of what I will soon introduce in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 as the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes*. To me, such gestures recall American artist Robert Smithson's own forays into the industrial wastelands of New Jersey, with his careful labelling of manufactured detritus with captions like *The Fountain Monument — Side View*, or *The Great Pipes Monument* [Fig.35]. These little bits of text, attached to such banal photographs, seemed like fragments of self-reflexive meditations on

the act of photography itself, signifiers of something more — monumental — than these pictures betray. I consider them "topographic photographs," a picture and action that captures the complexities of a marginalized and overlooked landscape in a sustained way. Compiled together, these surface details reveal the myriad logistical and bureaucratic processes that govern, maintain, and shape these sites. The topographic photograph is not just a flat picture, but a form of surface engagement that is simultaneously a picture and a topographical experience of landscape. Looking upon them, stacked up and gathered together in some kind of presumed order, they shift between empirical observation and description.

This sentiment echoes the American art historian Svetlana Alpers's distinction in landscape painting between visual empiricism and allegory in her 1983 publication *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*. In this book, Alpers argues that the Dutch landscape painting of the Gouden Eeuw (Golden Era) prioritized the meticulous observation of visual detail. For her, these Dutch artists were less concerned with narrative and symbolic overtures than capturing scenes with almost scientific-like objectivity, which reflected the Dutch culture of the time with its emphasis on trade, cartography, and empiricism.[408] This in contrast to the earlier painters of, for example, the Italian Renaissance whose focus was on narrative and idealized compositions. What Alpers illuminates is how the landscape genre itself was used to explore vision — how the world could be represented and understood through sight, the creation of a picture economy. The Dutch art historian Boudewijn Bakker calls such a descriptive method "wereldbeeld en landschap" in his book of the same title: literally, landscape and worldview.[408]

This is how I also consider topography. The aforementioned surface leaves some kind of tell-tale signs of activities that have occurred, even if those activities happen out of sight. Topography points to the ground plane, forcing us to look down at those marks to start excavating their scratches as a hint towards the logistical processes that need land to function. I do not pretend to assume that any visible surface will reveal all, but there is a corollary to the visible — its partner hunkered down below, hidden amidst the landscape's own duplicity to reveal and not to reveal. The topographic photograph deviates from the idealized and symbolic notion of a landscape photograph. Their topographical condition is amplified by their very status as photographs, containing a vivid and particular photographic quality that Smithson articulated in his 1967 essay "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey." Out in New Jersey, he wrote, "the landscape was no landscape, but 'a particular type of heliotypy,' a kind of self-destroying postcard world [...] I had been wandering in a picture I couldn't quite picture."[409]

As I wrote in Chapter 3, any mention of photography paired with topography immediately conjures the New Topographics, a grouping of photographers in the mid-1970s who collectively reframed their cameras to capture the marks previously expunged by an earlier generation of photographers. But where the topographic photograph diverges from their consideration of "new topography" — a way to visually account for the rise

408 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

409 Boudewijn Bakker, *Landschap en wereldbeeld: van Van Eyck tot Rembrandt* (Bussum: Uitgeverij Thoth, 2004).

408 Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 70.

of novel forms of space that was particularly prevalent in the 1970s — is to deliberately not affect a subjective stance and reject the formalism and symbolism indicative of traditional landscape conventions.[410] The topographic photograph arises not from within an art historical lineage, but as a response to the particular conditions of the logistical landscape.

In the Port of Rotterdam, those conditions are what I previously framed as bureaucratic vision — a type of vision that unites power and control which shapes both the physical and symbolic environment while creating consensus for how the site is perceived and experienced. As such, bureaucratic vision is a "fixing" enterprise that establishes any image prior to photographic intervention, managing the Port's self-representation and squashing subjectivity, artistic or otherwise.

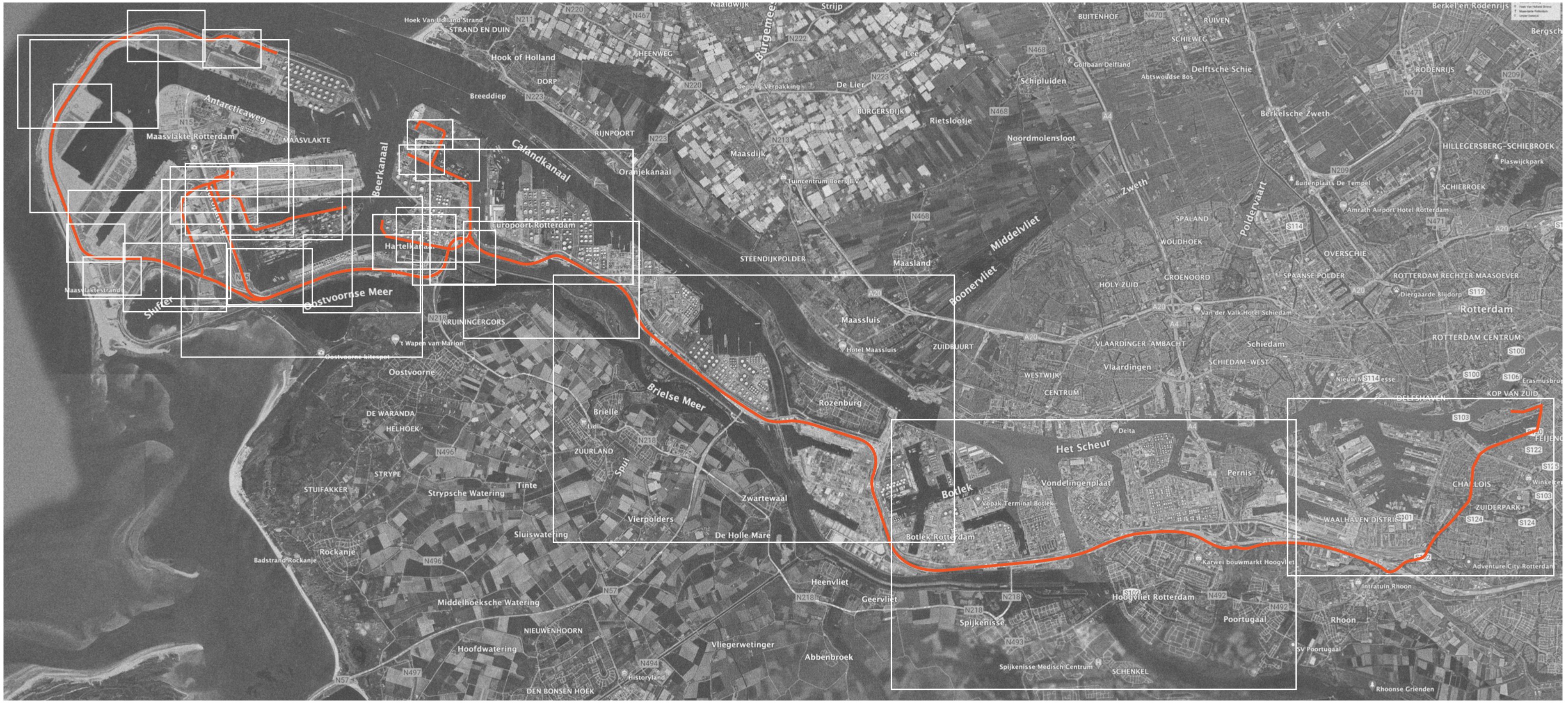
Before going any further, I double-checked the dictionary definition of topography to ensure my assumption was accurate.[411] My instinct was correct; "topography" refers to both two- and three-dimensional space. This could include the physical surface of the Earth or its representation of those features in a map or survey. Both of these options imply surfaces — of the physical and, potentially, the photographic. There is the photograph itself, a flat two-dimensional representation, but also the three-dimensional space of its making. However, this dimensionality implies other layers as well. The topographic photograph uses information gathered from the logistical landscape as a form of raw material, enabling viewers to come into contact with this data and process it into something meaningful. It gathers specific physical information, which has the potential for exploration and extrapolation. Its surface is a base of raw information, gathered into a cohesive collection from which the underlying cause or concern — the logistical landscape — can then be deployed in various formats: publication, exhibition, or a physical land-based intervention like an overlook or tour.

I do not label them conventional landscape photographs, but surfaces of information that visualize a vast landscape hewn out of algorithms, managerial processes, and efficiency experts. The topographic photograph is a conscientious surveyor, systematically scanning the surfaces of land. They are presented in a serialized and gridded manner to demand attention is paid to its surfaces — the landscape's and the photograph's — to help see in what ways these surfaces may conspire in the production of bureaucratic vision. They are akin to how the American photographer Martha Rosler regarded her own photographs, as "radical metonymy, with a setting implying the condition itself."[412] The topographic photograph's settings are the vast swathes of logistical land that stretch across the globe penetrating everyday life, a global infrastructure of which it is difficult to know anything.

410 Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2011).

411 "Topography," *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed February 29, 2024. The OED points out one of the etymological roots of "topography" finds itself dating from 15th-century Holland as a plain-woven fabric used in the house; a sort of "topography" of domesticity.

412 Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts on Documentary Photography," in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 195.



Route 01 - overview of all sections

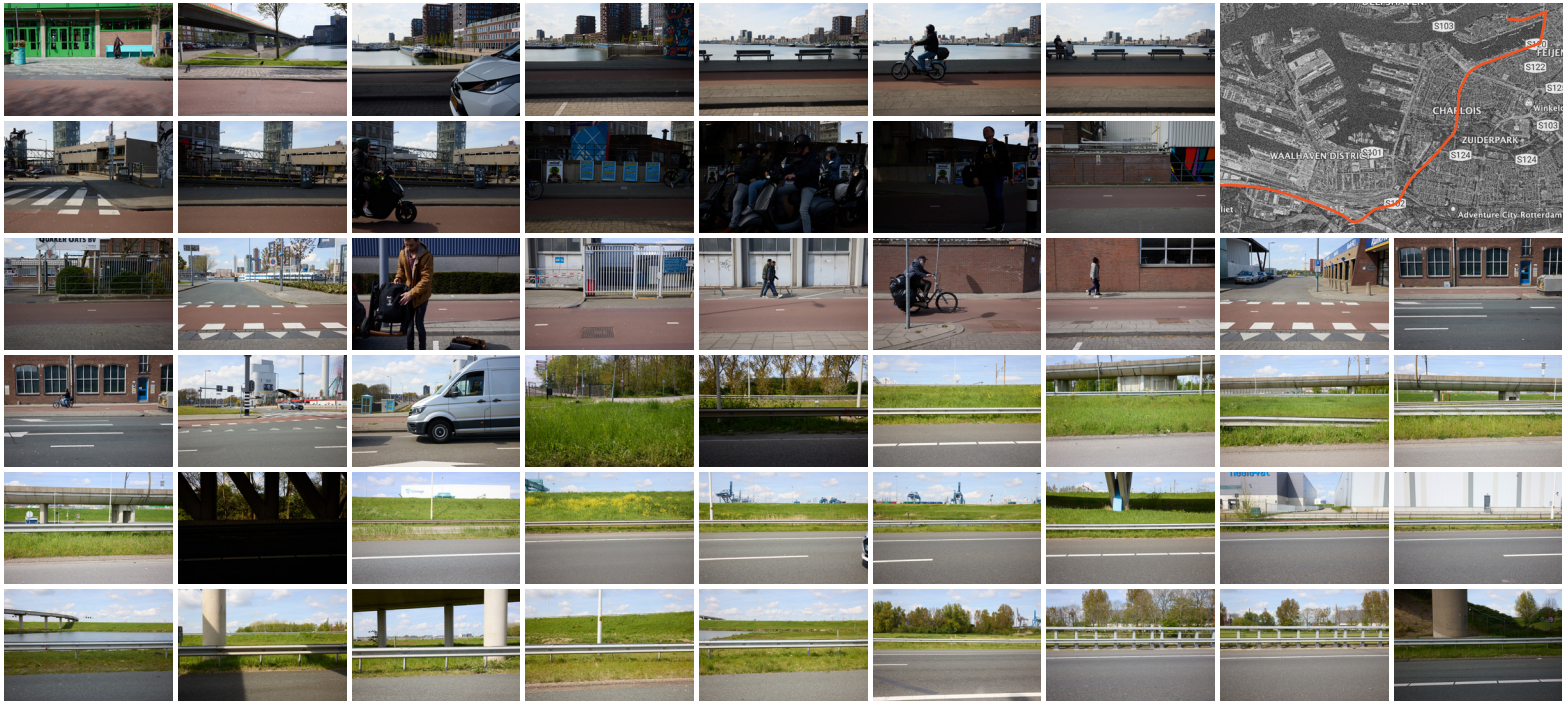
#02 MIS

Route:
Drive from Delistraat 12E, Rotterdam (home) to the end of Missouriweg. Return home, but take a detour to the Maasvlakte Oil Terminal.

Task:
(Take one photo every few seconds).

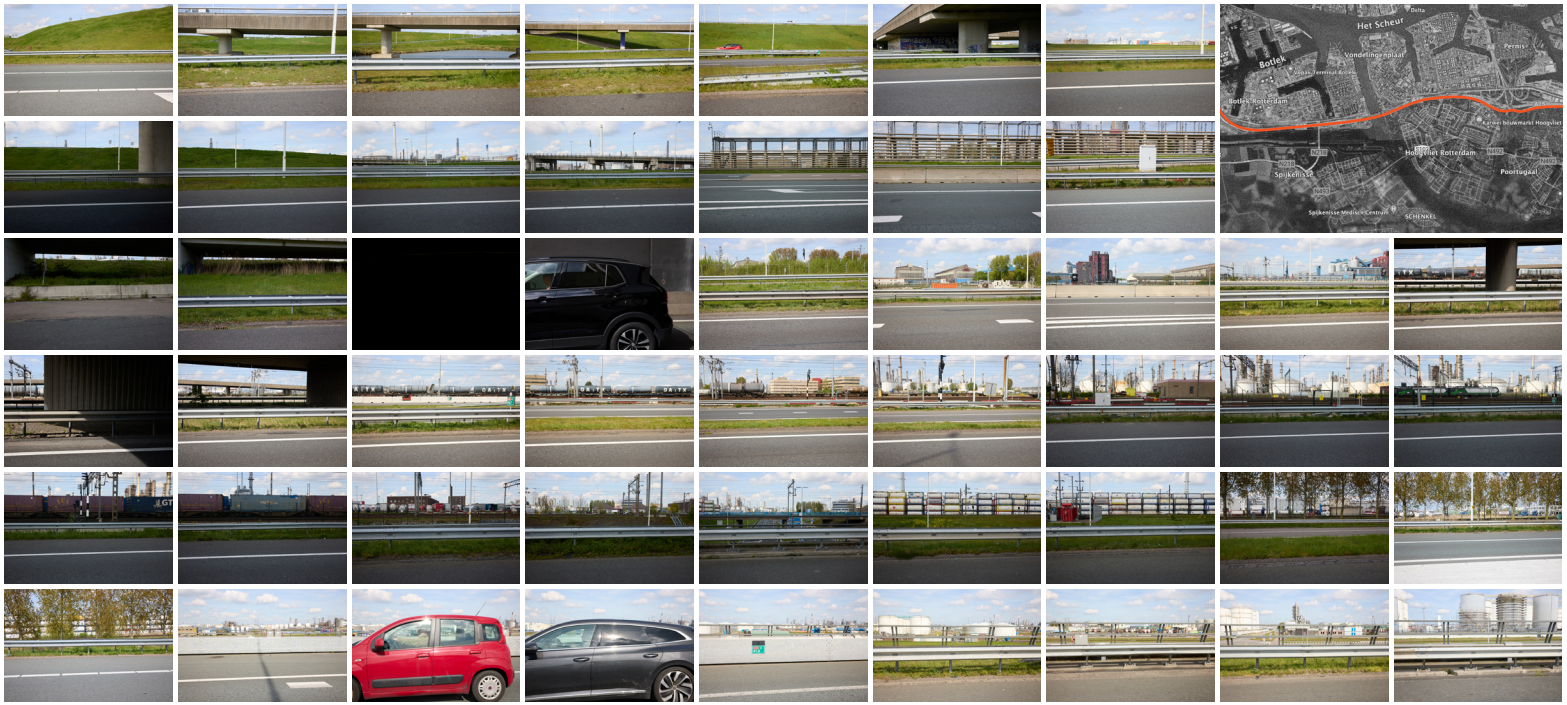
Distance:
124 km

Route 01

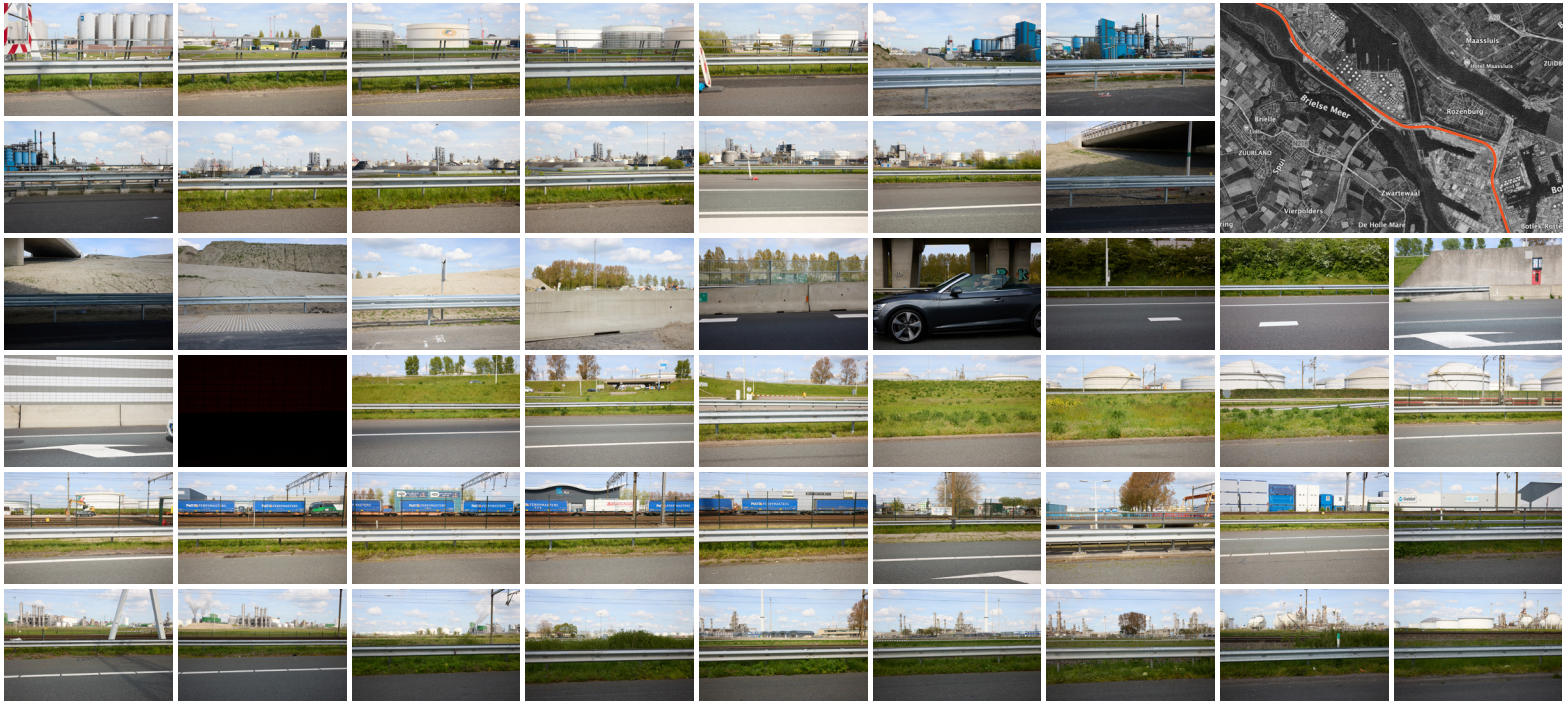


Route 01

MIS #02


Delta
Het Scheur
Botlek
Vondelingenplaat
Botlek Rotterdam
Karel Doormanstraat Hoogstraat
Hoogstraat Rotterdam
Spijkenisse
Poortugaal
Spijkenisse Medisch Centrum
SCHUNKEL

Route 01



Route 01

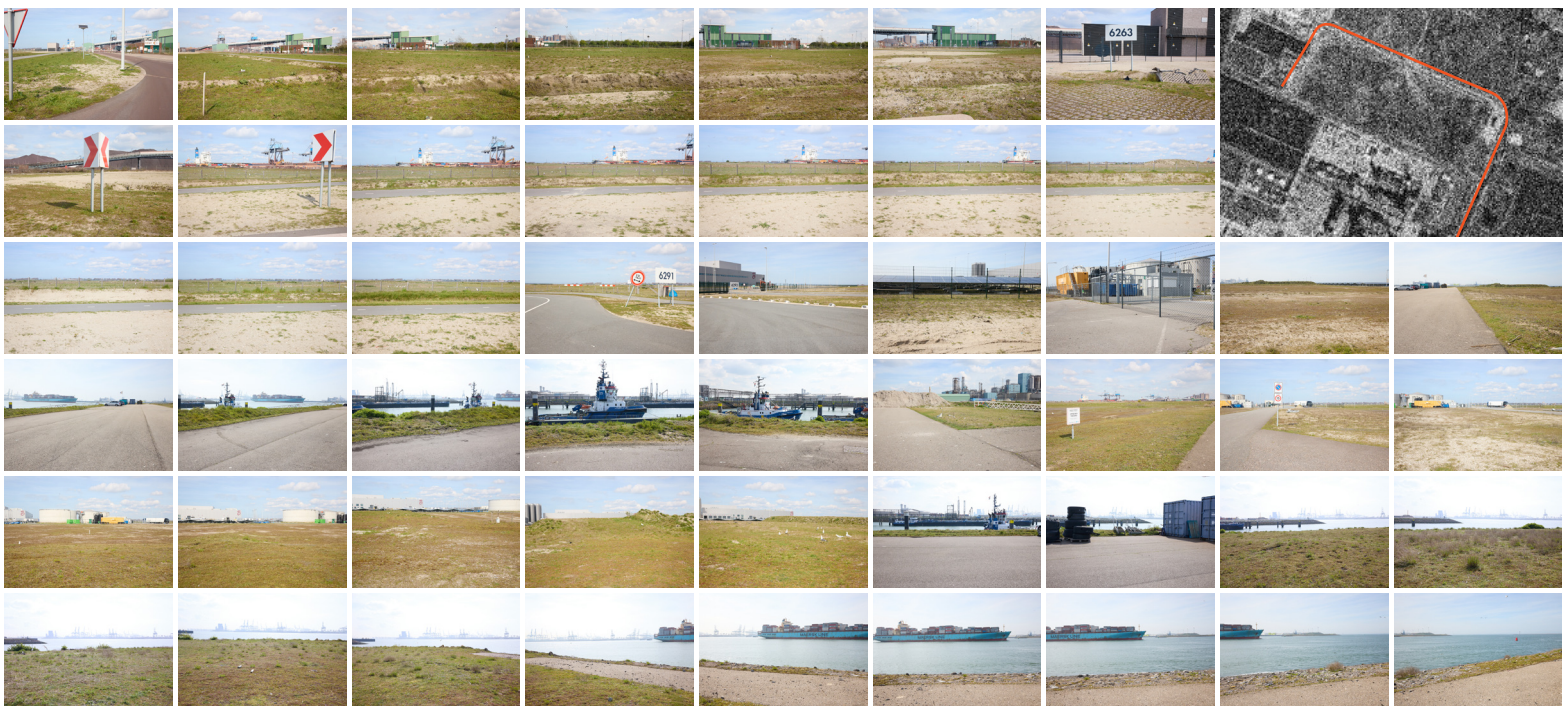
MIS #02

Route 01

Route 01

MIS

#02



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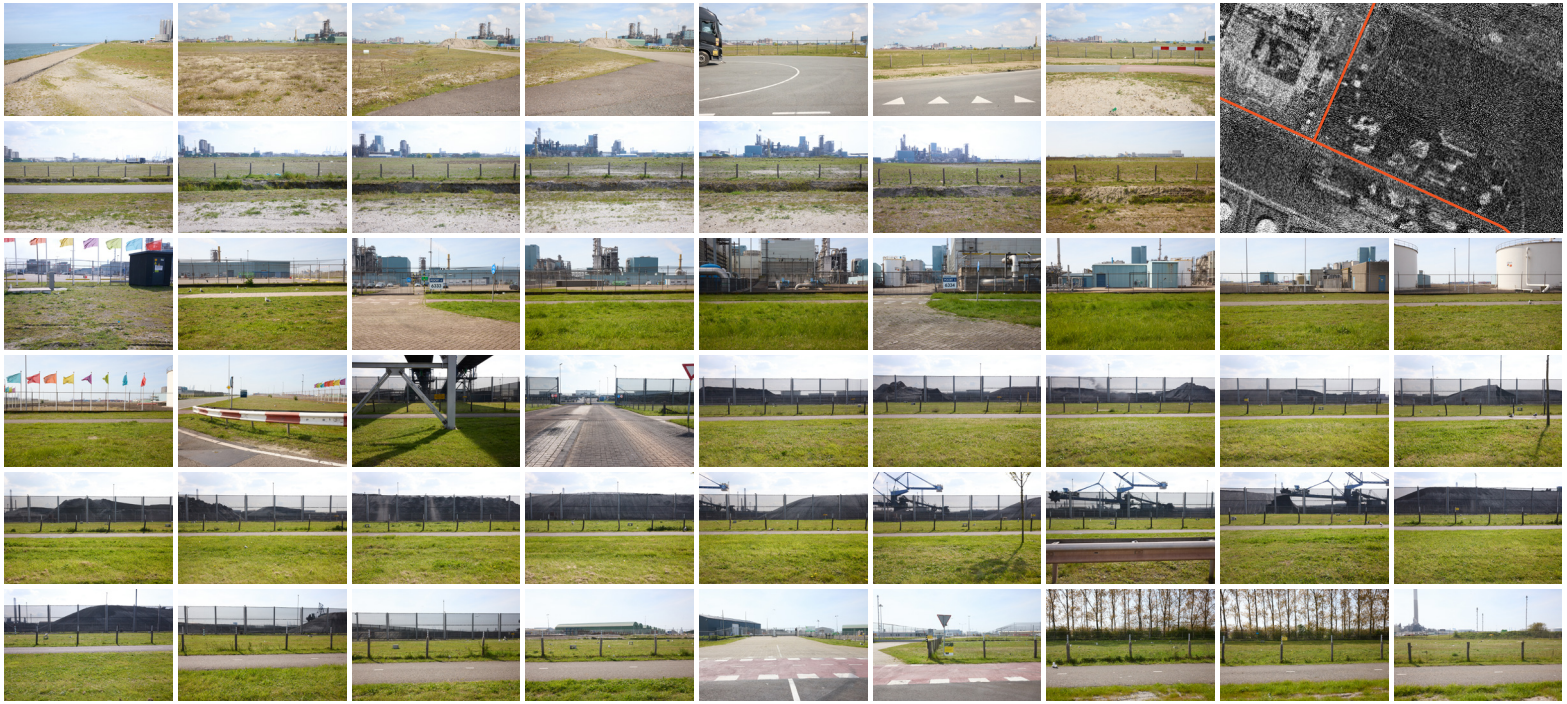


Route 01

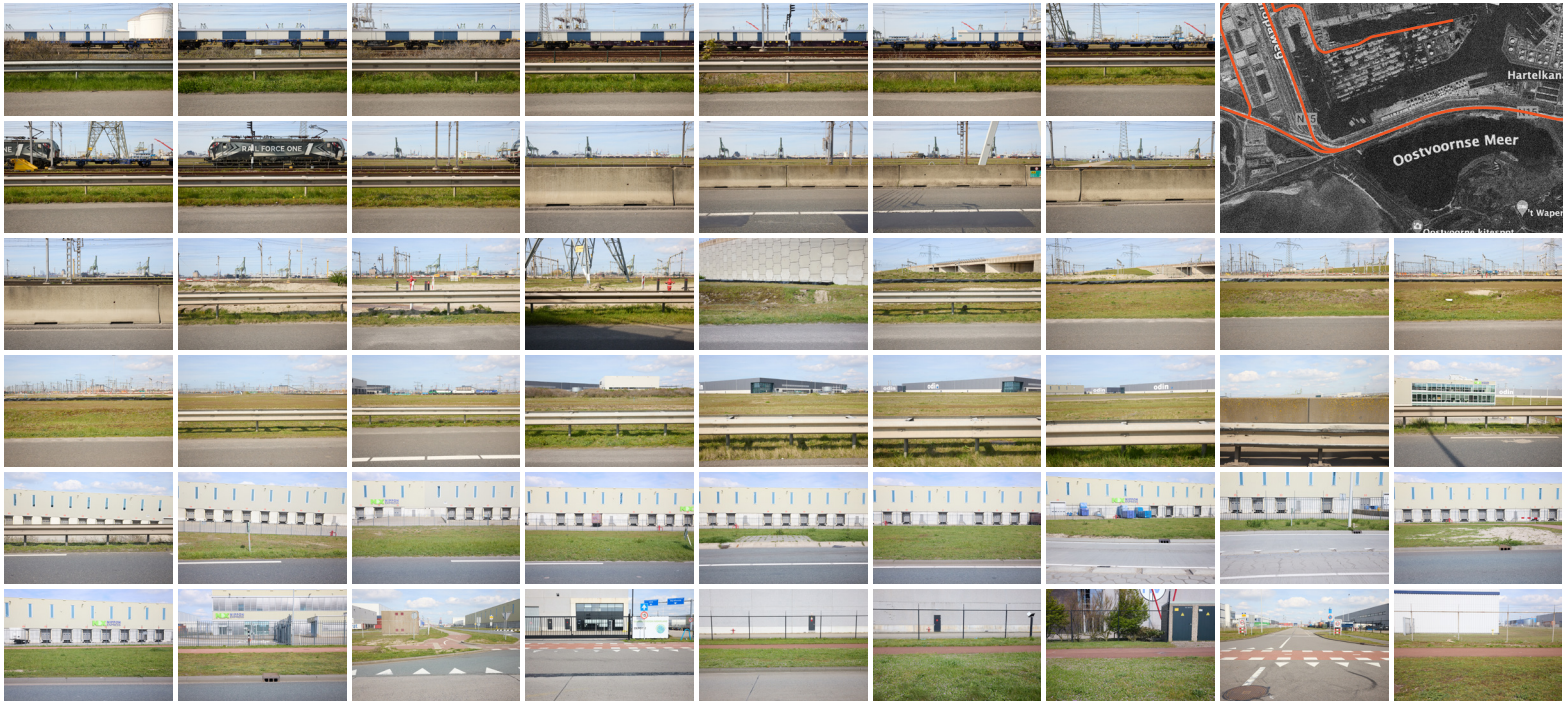
MIS #02

Route 01

Route 01

MIS #02

Route 01



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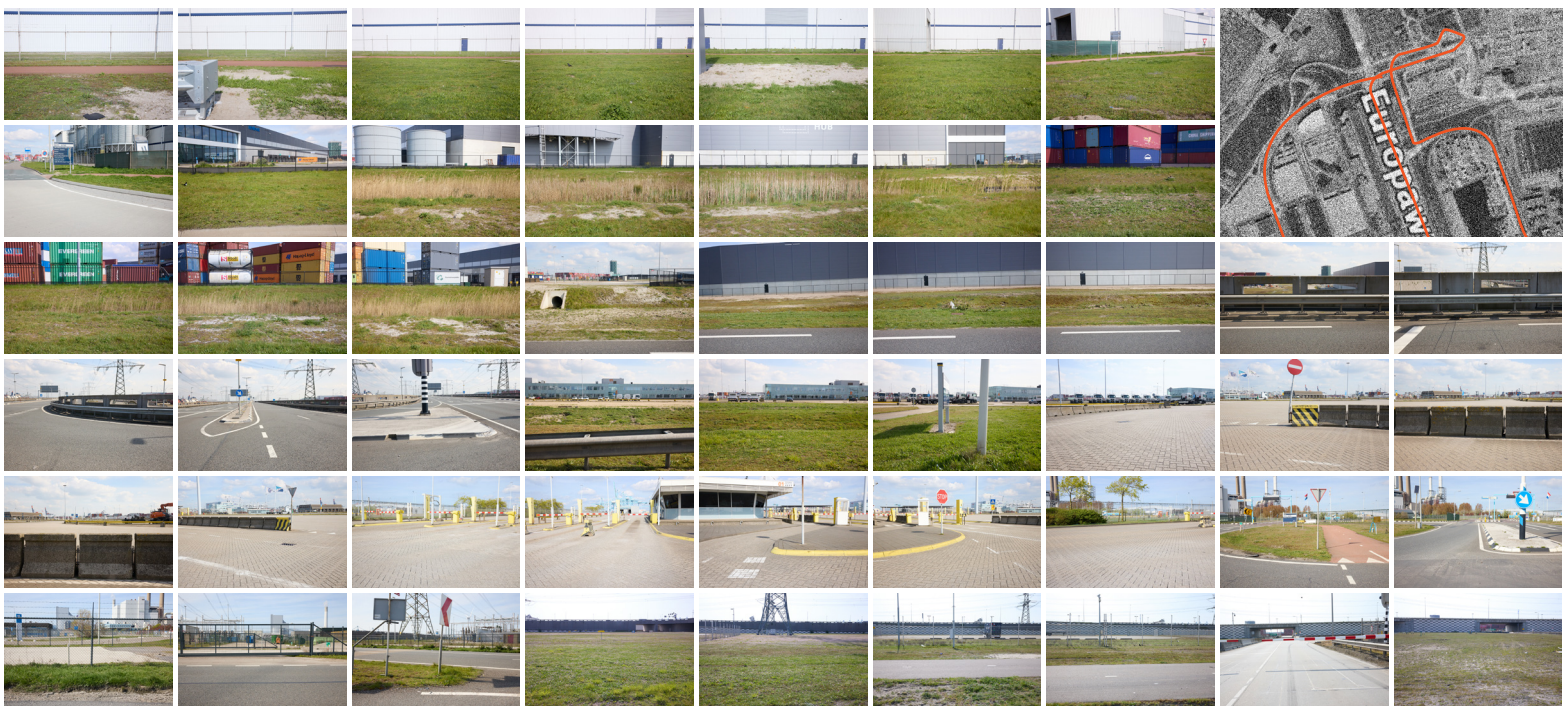

Route 01

Route 01

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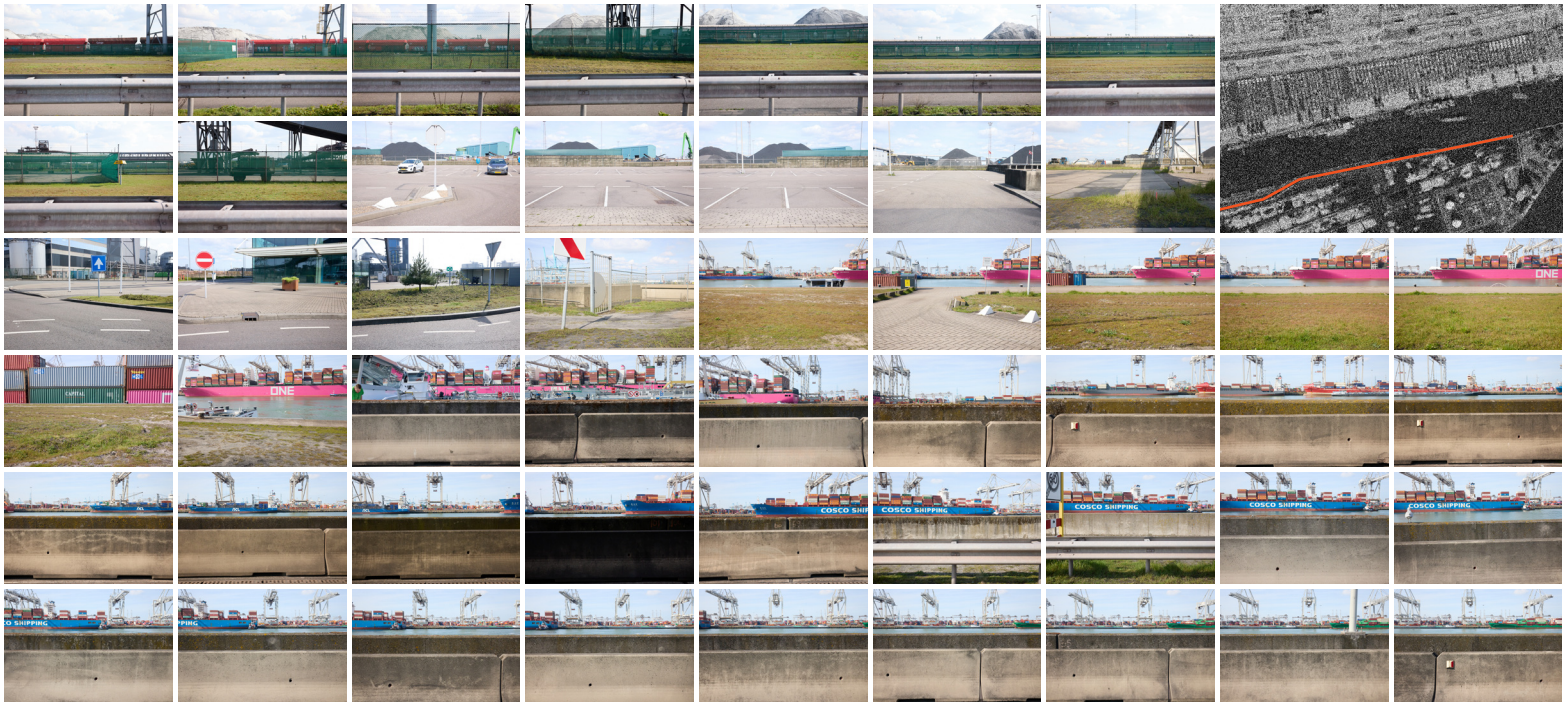

Route 01

Route 01

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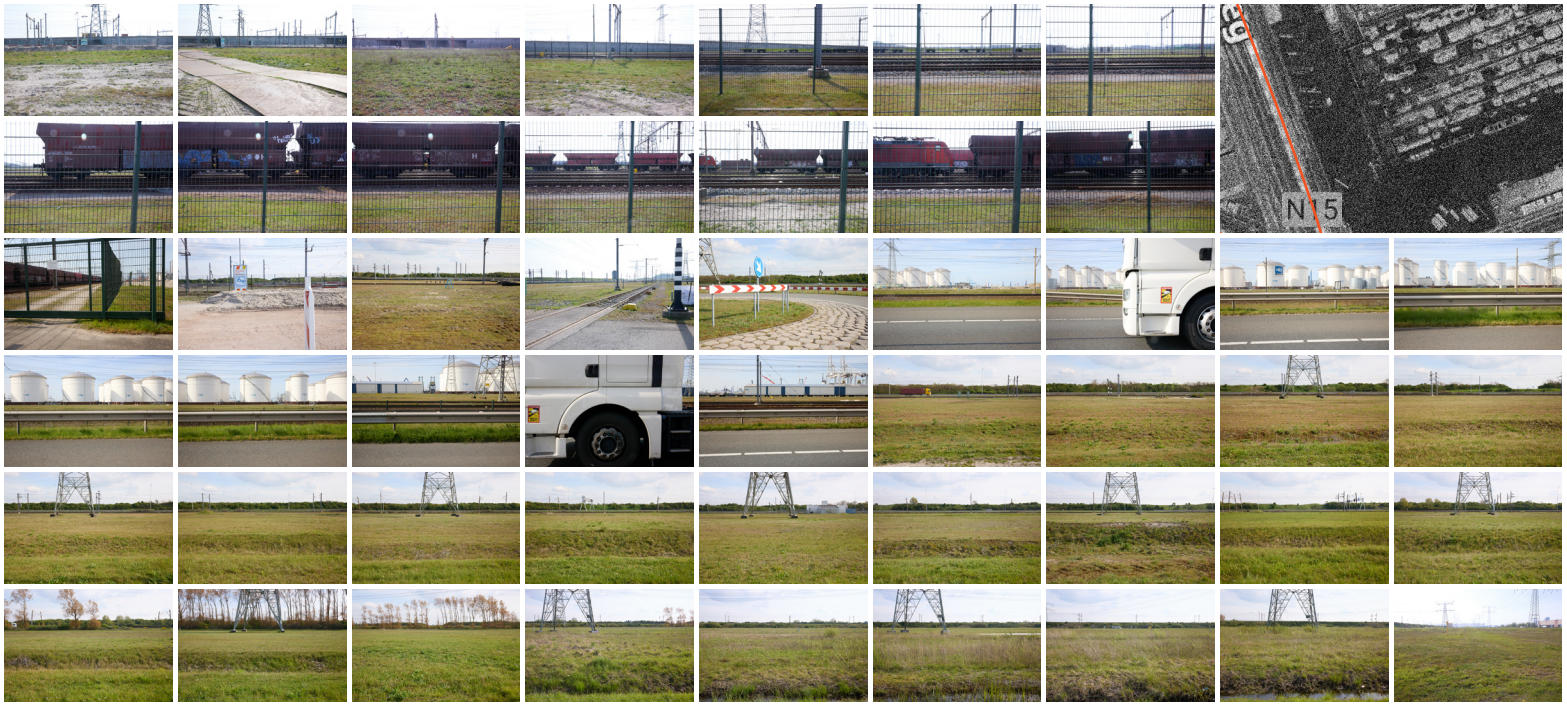
Route 01

Route 01



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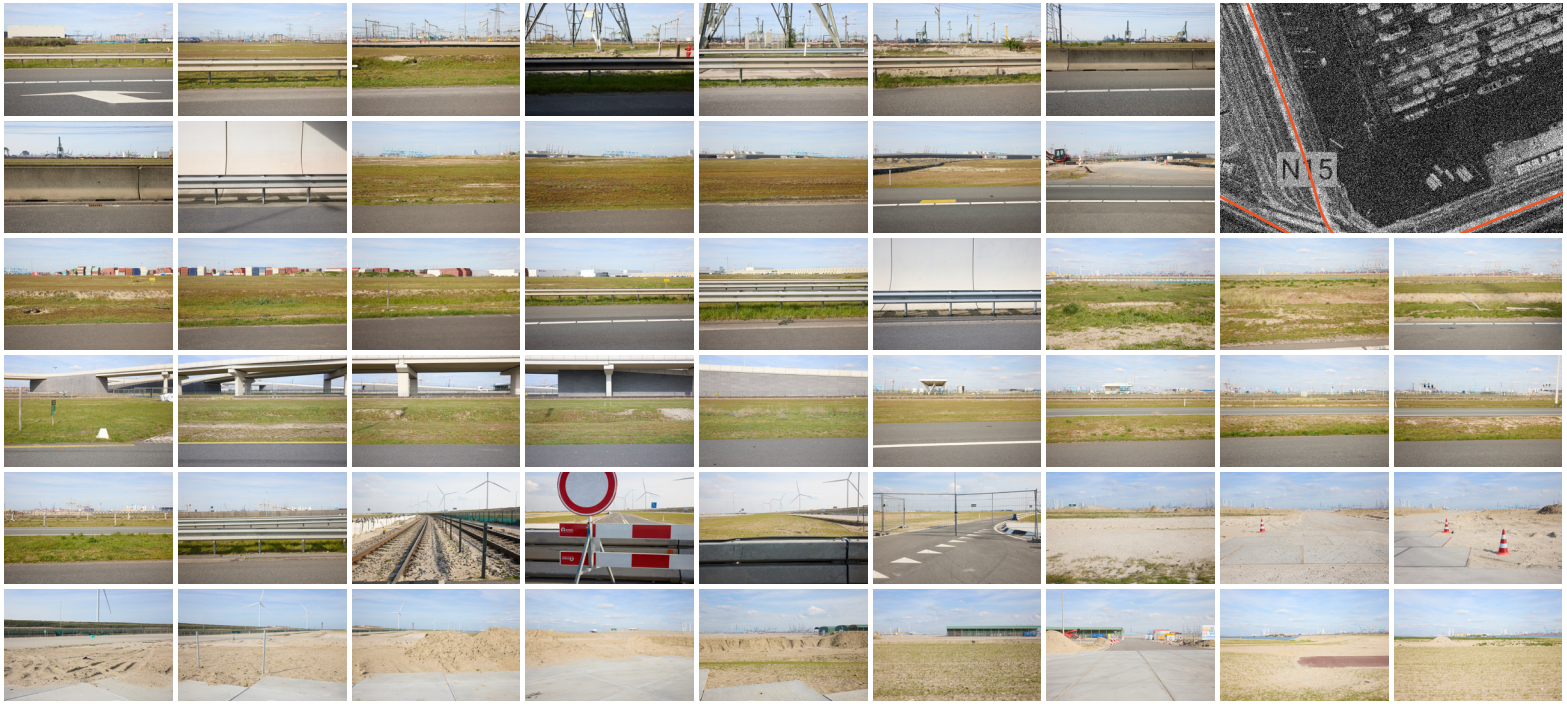

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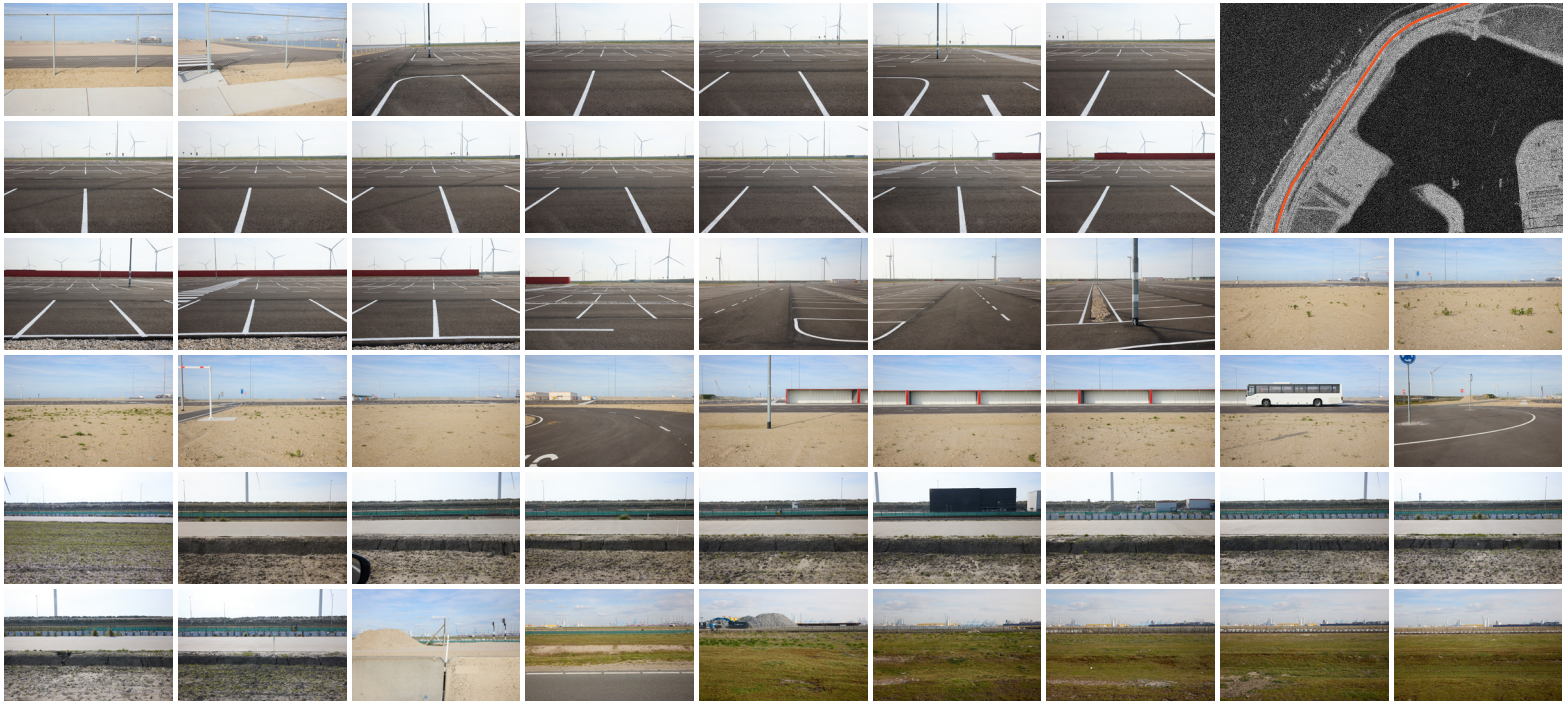
Route 01

MIS #02

Route 01



Route 01

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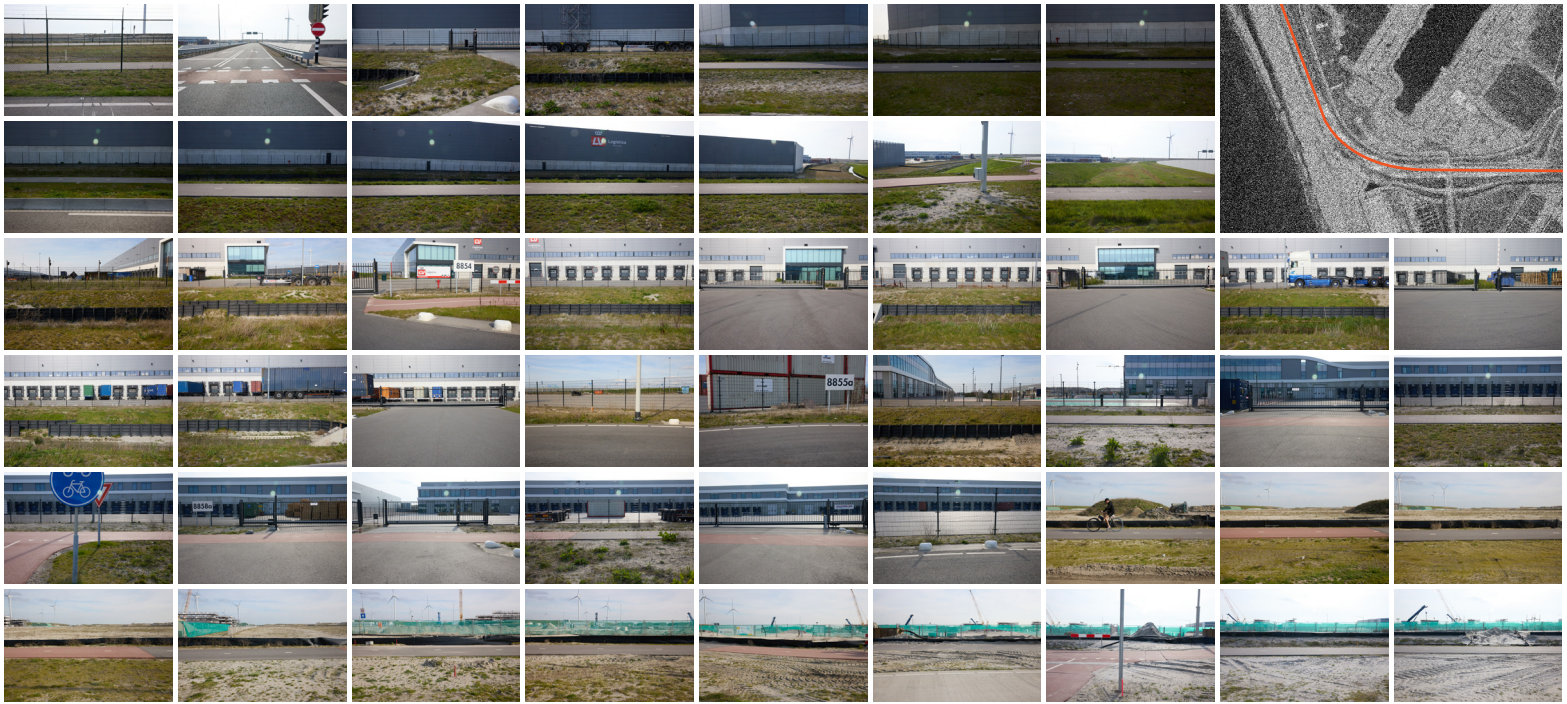

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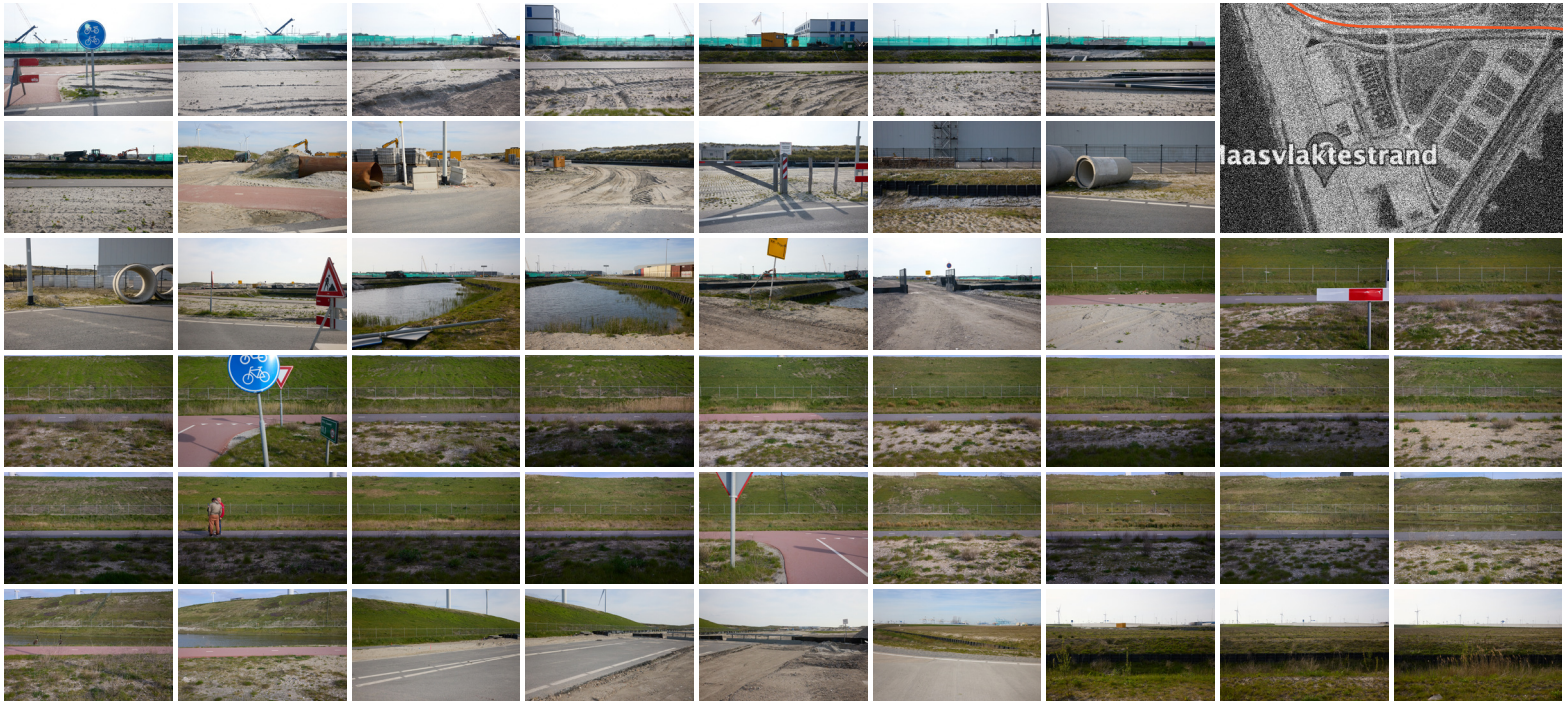

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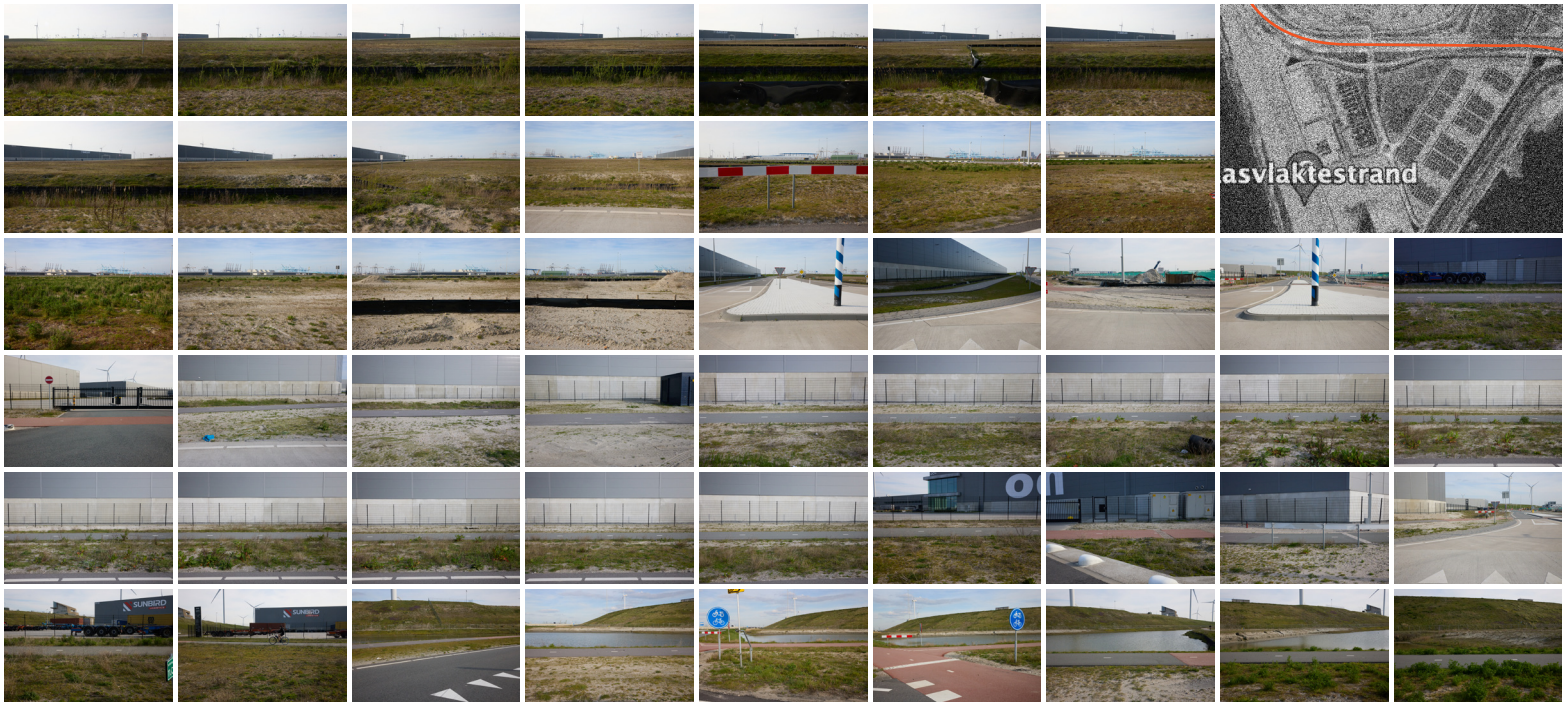

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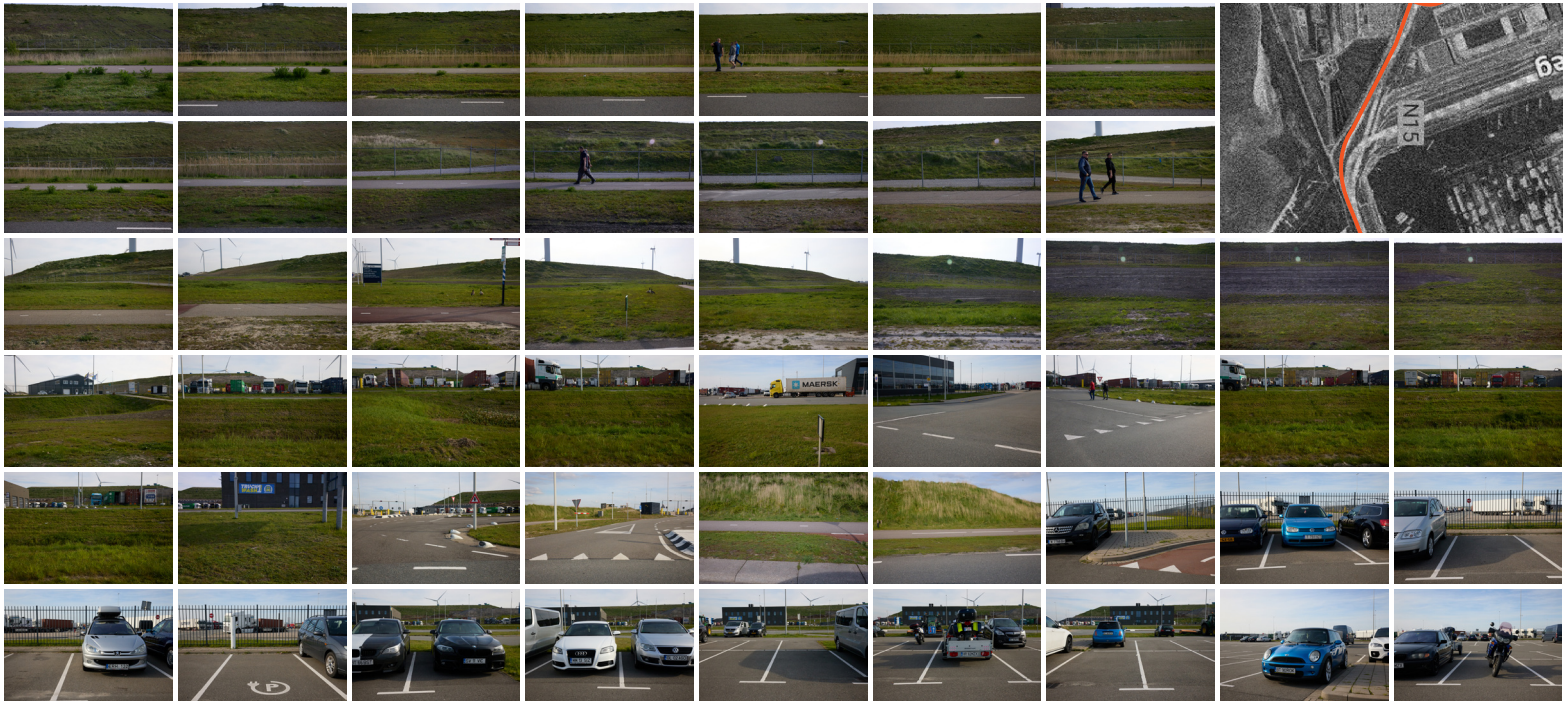

Route 01

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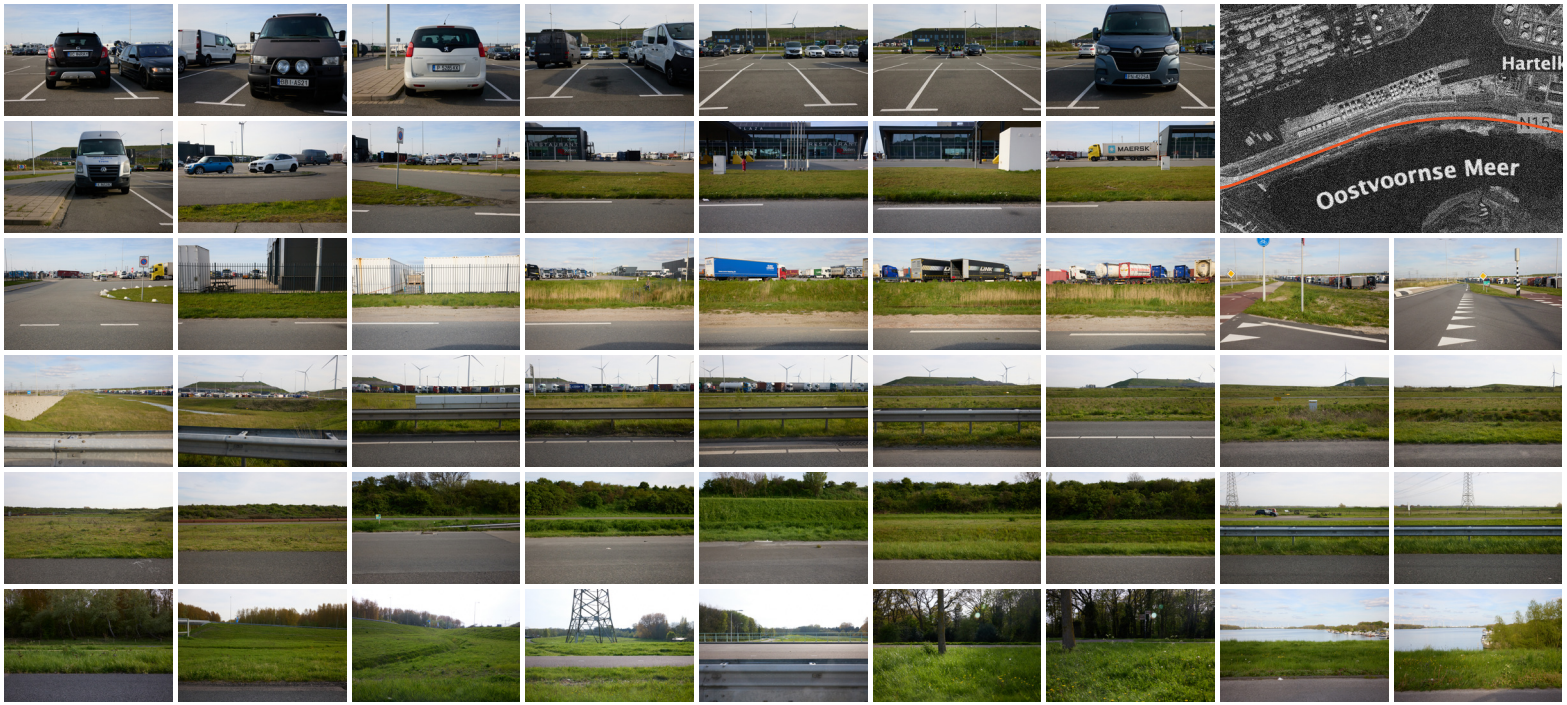

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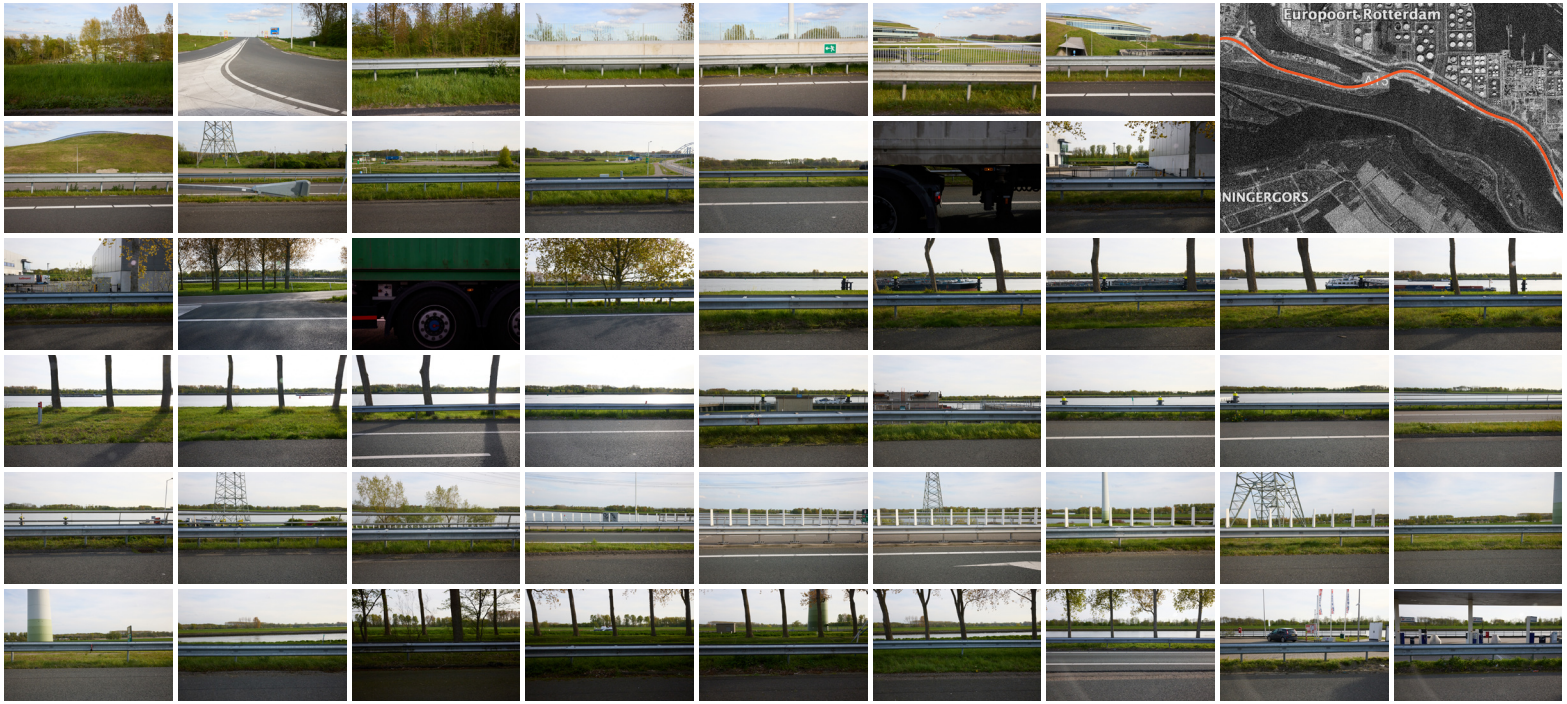

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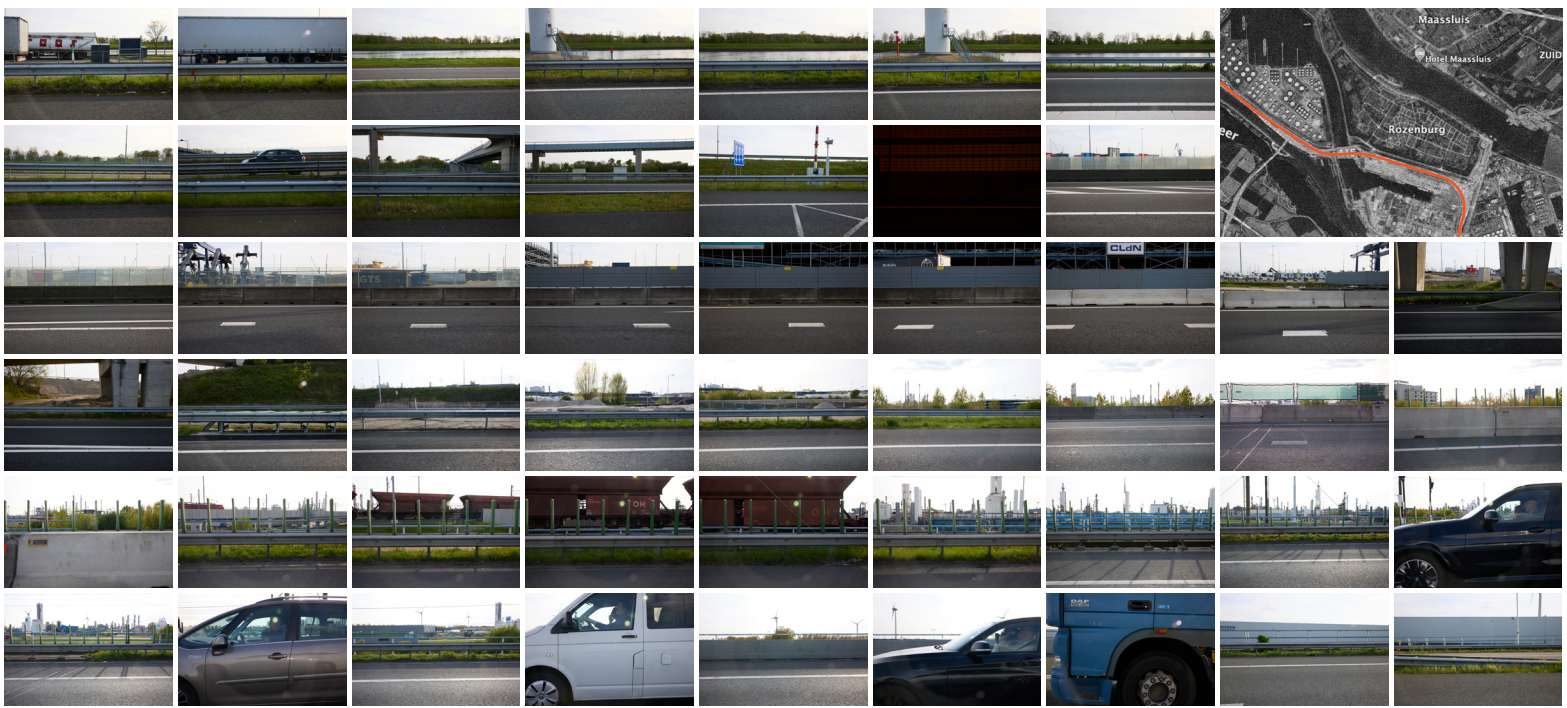

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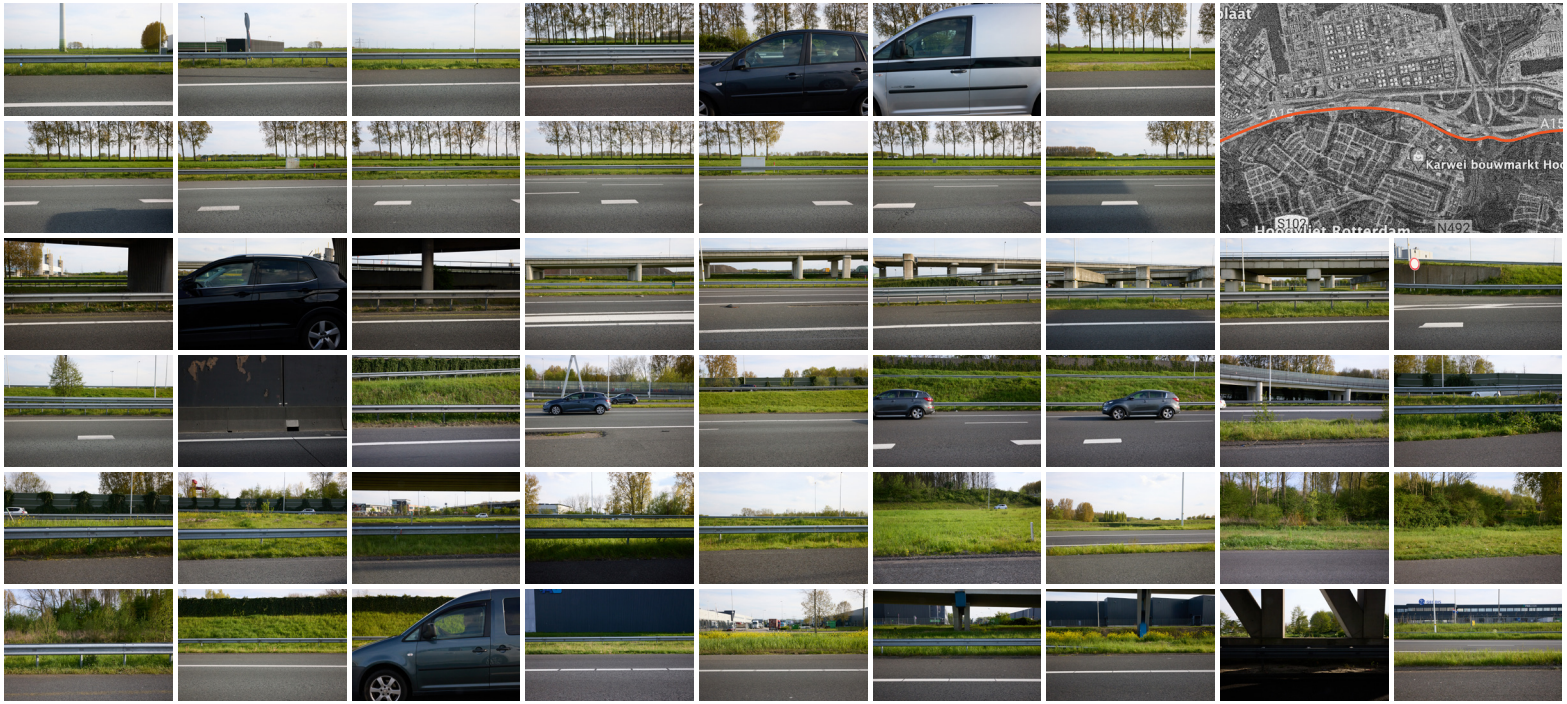


Route 01

MIS #02

S103
CHARLOIS
ZUIDERPARK
WAALHAVEN DISTRI
S124
S124
S301
S302
Adventure City Rotterda
BANDEN SERVICE
AUTO IN & VERKOOP

Route 01

A TOPOGRAPHY OF INFORMATION

I am sitting amongst so many photographs that I stagger at making any comprehensive decision; I know what I am hoping to achieve, but their volume paralyzes action. Instead, I let the photos fester, invading my work and living space while I decide when and how to start. The topographical photographs have transmogrified into topographies of indecision, perhaps even obsession. And yet I start to realize that their very largesse, these artifacts of systematic documentation, are the point: it's an exhaustive, yet limited, visual record of the Port of Rotterdam, without any potential for being conclusive. Their very accumulation as surface matter lies in the thousands and thousands — or probably billions and billions — of discrete parts that work together to form a topography of logistics.[413] I have now started to dismantle these piles of pictures and arrange them into some sort of grid. I try not to treat them as "landscape photographs" or impose any excessively subjective or expressively-driven approach, like ordering them in a sequence that highlights their individual characteristics as I would do in a traditional photography project. At some point, due to the vast quantity of photographs and enormity of the task, my overt hand in their ordering is denied, capitulating to their metadata like location, date, and time to control their own arranging. I am now a conductor of energy, sifting and sorting and compiling.

To manage their assembly, I allow the project to take over my living room. Instead of being confronted by stacks of 14,617 little pieces of paper depicting bridges, cranes, concrete fragments, oil soaked-asphalt, piles of gravel, vestigial Spring-time trees, and rusted fences, amongst a whole slew of other objects, I am now confronted with the entirety printed out and pinned on any available wall. It is almost as if, by standing here in front of these huge grids, I am staring through the windshield of my car and driving through the Port of Rotterdam. I gaze intently; at first glance the topographic photographs appear banal and placid, almost diffuse. On closer inspection, there seems to be a survey of the conditions of bureaucracy (because of the array of obvious displays of quarantine and hazard) and logistics (cargo ships, stacks of shipping containers, transportation infrastructure, maritime construction, the North Sea). Because I have limited accessibility, the path my car follows is dictated by the extent of public roads, registering a threshold between accessibility and denial, inclusion and exclusion. The foreground belongs to the individual — these are surfaces we can make note of. The background is the preserve of the official, retreating behind obstacles and also distance, forbidden quarters to the everyday public. As a document of information, the topographic photograph is a relay of the site's condition coming back through the lens of the camera, past the shutter, and settling itself as photons onto the silicon grid of the camera's digital sensor to be algorithmically recomposed for later viewing. What's left is an exposure of land that has been transformed, consumed, managed, and represented within contemporary systems of production and infrastructure.

413 I allude here to Matthew Coolidge, founder and director the *Center for Land Use Interpretation*, who framed the continental United States as formed of "billions and billions" of artifacts. See: The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "It Takes One: Matthew Coolidge," July 17, 2019, accessed February 19, 2024, https://www.tclf.org/it-takes-one-matthew-coolidge.

414 Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," *October* 3 (Spring 1977): 68-81.

415 Nathan Jurgenson, *The Social Photo: On Photography and Social Media* (London: Verso, 2019).

416 Krauss, "Notes on the Index," 75.

417 Trevor Paglen, *Blank Spots on the Map: The Dark Geography of the Pentagon's Secret World* (New York: Dutton Adult, 2009), 16.

Following the American art historian Rosalind Krauss's definition of the index in art, these photographs excise the symbolic and representative in favour of photography's capacity to have a direct, causal relationship to its referent.[414] The information value of the picture is prime; metaphor is banished in favour of light's capacity to register itself as a trace of the real, returning to Rosler's "radical metonymy." This doesn't erase my role or subjectivity, but it does relegate these and related decisions to background noise. The topographic photograph is set up in direct relation to the land; its framing is ill-considered. I am beholden to the "camera eye" of the logistical landscape, which is prefigured as an already-assembled image awaiting its photosensitive transfer.[415] In this situation, I am producing a form of what I termed earlier as conscientious surveying, where the camera scans the horizon, gathering up what you yourself might be looking at. The emphasis is on *photography*, fashioned into a utilitarian device set into surveyor mode, rather than on the photographer. The photograph, in this sense, is the object itself — the Port — recalling Krauss's comment that the photograph is sub- or pre-symbolic.[416] American artist Trevor Paglen, discussing his work on military black sites (locations the US military refuses to acknowledge are "real" and existent — think of the rendition flights that flew across the globe in the opening stages of the so-called War on Terror or the very real Area 51), suggests that the indexical nature of topography resists the invisible, by stating "geography theory tells us that it really isn't possible to make things disappear, to render non-existent."[417]

The topographic photograph's commitment to information is also a condition of its systematic approach, which is further enhanced through various tactics that come after its production, like seriality and repetition. It is a direct approach, where the camera dictates the outcome as well as my actions as the operator. The actions of the camera, as it glides along at a semi-steady speed as an appendage of my car, act as a kind of landscaper of logistical processes, gathering various actions into its field of view, while leaving its trace as an image to later reveal the systems, networks, and structures that often remain overlooked. Indexical, in this context, is also gestural, pointing to the act of something and moving a step closer towards scrutiny. The index isn't objective, but it points to the fact that things do exist in spite of the logistical tendency to recede from view. Topography is not only a promise of the visible, but it is also a sign of what lies right in front, if only we look a little harder.

CAR, CAMERA, INSTRUCTION, ROUTE

Now I discuss the mechanics of making a topographic photograph. The essential ingredients in the production of a topographic photograph are car, camera, instruction, and route. My car is a 2018 Opel Astra Sport Touring Wagon 1.4 Turbo (grey, 101,433 kilometres on the odometer at time of writing, give or take). It is simultaneously a mode of transportation and a camera prosthetic. In the Port, the car is not just a form of travel, but an almost sin-

gular way of experiencing the landscape. Managing the car and camera is a one-person operation. I use a Canon R5c, a mirrorless camera that is slightly smaller and lighter than a modern DSLR, equipped with a 16mm—35mm f/2.8 L III zoom lens (preferably the latest version with image stabilization, which helps photographing in constant motion). Focal length is closer to 35mm than 16mm; this prevents too much distortion and ensures the field of view is replicable to what the human eye sees. The camera is attached to the interior of the front windshield using a suction mount and Manfrotto Magic Arm. The Magic Arm is an articulating device and can be configured in all directions. This is crucial; the camera needs to be placed perpendicular to the car and road. The camera is always positioned behind the window. Inclement weather is not an obstacle. The camera receives a cable release, a small device that triggers the camera remotely and allows the driver/operator to choose the durational intervals. Depending on the circumstances of the pre-given instruction, a flurry of photographs can be fired off, or timing can be paced by various (and, at times, unexpected) conditions. However, the consistent factor is that the camera is almost always under operation, its shutter in near-constant motion.

The cable release is plugged directly into the camera and does not use Bluetooth or infrared. I purposely make this a semi-automatic enterprise, a symbiotic collaboration between operator, camera, and car — all three are integral to the topographic photograph's making. One hand is on the steering wheel, while the other grips the shutter release, triggering each picture. I may choose at times to alter the orderly instruction, defying the ground rules or modifying them. My hand is also an index of time, registering the photograph that does not totally succumb to the demands of the instruction. Recall from Bureau Mission One where I shared how in making photographs of bureaucratic vision, I held up my hand in the field of view of the camera, creating an intervention into the logistical landscape, a form of dissensus in practical form. There is a separation between me and the logistical landscape that the car colludes in producing, alienating me from the landscape. The car is the only practical mode of travel out here as the distances are long. Even with my feet on the ground, I am somewhat unmoored, cast adrift amongst landmarks, yet still at a distance, moving through space that, while not largely inaccessible, keeps its operations and social relations largely hidden from view. I consider my hand's attachment to the camera as purposeful, a choreographic gesture that in light of all this automated, algorithmic processing — of the land, and of the pictures my camera records — represents the social and technological conditions of the topographic photograph's making.

This brings me to American filmmaker and artist Andrew Norman Wilson's ScanOps, a series of images based on accidents occurring in the process of digitization for Google Books, in which software distortions and, most prominently, the hands of (low wage) employees who scan these books for Google become visible, considered anomalies in the machine [Fig.36].[418] I waited to introduce ScanOps in particular here because it is a work about work — about the labour process of knowledge production, and also about how humans are cast within the photographic apparatus as well. That is,

418 Olivia Solon, "Artist Reveals Disembodied Workers Scanning Books for Google," *Wired*, January 17, 2014, accessed May 7, 2024, https://www.wired.com/story/scanops/.

[Fig.36]

419 Laurel Ptak, "Andrew Norman Wilson with Laurel Ptak: ScanOps," *Aperture Magazine*, February 26, 2013, accessed May 7, 2024.

photography is not only the machinery but also the social processes and systems in which the medium operates. Wilson's comment about this project reflects a Fordist notion of production — "press button, turn page, repeat."[419] In each of the pictures, there is a portion of a hand that breeches the frame. Usually, it is just one or two fingers delicately placed on the edges of some page from a book; each operator wearing a finger condom in a surprising colour combination of either pink or yellow or blue or purple. Even in their very anonymized state, humanity still cracks through: some nail polish here, someone else bites their nails. To me, this is a perfect encapsulation of a photographic apparatus that doesn't stop at the machine itself. Working in the Port amidst systems of anonymizing and automated labour made me consider that I cannot completely capitulate to the dictates of automation, even if the camera is strapped to my car. Wilson's ScanOps signals that such processes are not separate from ourselves, and that even though they may be excised from the imagination, there is still a material legacy.

A condition of this research is to acknowledge how we are entangled within the automated functions of logistics by asserting that landscape is also a thing to be experienced and seen. That is, the topographic photograph is not a severed mode of production that formulates its own picture, but it is part of a living process. My hands, either marked as an abrupt moment thrust into the frame or as an addendum to the camera, underscore how I — we — are complicit within social and technological arrangements. Without my hand — or the hands of the ScanOps operators — the world becomes reduced to an inhuman state. These seemingly inconsequential gestures, to me, are anything but. They reveal traces of a technology that produced them, yes, but also that a human was a vital organ in their creation.

With exposure and autofocus set, the car departs. Maintaining average light conditions covers potential for any dramatic overexposure or underexposure. The histogram is set to appear on the camera's LCD screen, a tool that assists in maintaining average exposure by establishing that highlights and shadows are effectively registered and no extremes are clipped. The aperture floats in the middle, around f8 is sufficient to have reasonable depth-of-field, balancing the foreground and middle-ground. There is no ideal speed for the car, although around 30–40 km/h does the job. The speed limits are generally followed; this could be anything from 100 km/h on the highways to around 30 km/h on the arterial service roads. At times, the immediate foreground will be filled by walls, barriers, concrete abutments, and sand dunes, all within a few meters of the car; at other moments, there will only be a singular line in the distance severing sea from sky, the logistical horizon. These extremes are part of the logistical landscape.

The car and camera scans the varied surfaces according to a set of instructions: for example, "Drive from Delistraat 12E (home), to the end of Missouriweg. Return home, but take a detour to the Maasvlakte Oil Terminal. (Take one photo every few seconds)." Or, "Drive the entirety of the Distripark and circle the warehouses. Use any available public road." These instructions are akin to what British art historian Margaret Iversen terms as "auto-maticity," where the outcomes of a rule-governed performance determines

the conditions of its making.[420] Iversen frames it as a systematic set of processes and procedures in the making of art, referencing American artist Ed Ruscha's photobook production, where he laid out pre-determined rules or instructions which are then carried out as a performance. Iversen considers auto-maticity as performative, which "involves the partial abdication of authorial control, in favour of accident, chance or unforeseen circumstances." The performance of the premise was more important than the act of capture, consistent with military, real estate, and home photographers of the day.[421] Ruscha gave himself pretty simple instruction: "record the twenty six gasoline stations along Route 66 from Los Angeles to Oklahoma," for example.[422] Instruction, as Iversen points out, blur the boundaries between photography as a medium of documentation and representation and as a more-than-representational act, highlighting the performance of making a photograph. For me, these instructions expand the conventions of landscape photography and invite viewers into a dialogue between the instruction — the performance of making — and the photograph itself.

The goal via the set of instructions is to cover all *accessible* roads; a standing directive is to drive as close as possible to security checkpoints, fences, and other control points, but do not pass. These route instructions mark a presence of an official void by articulating all available and public roads, inscribing a map of visibility and invisibility. Territory is marked in car lengths by its average speed, even as the Port resists any attempt to frame it. The route determines the periphery, demarcating the boundary between public and official. If stopped at a traffic light, or any other stoppage, the camera keeps shooting; these are registrations of time, responsive to the conditions of the site, driving, and the production of photographs. Route instructions are performed at different points in the day and year, and in varied weather conditions. Focal lengths are adjusted on the same routes, revealing how the photograph is altered by varying fields of vision. There is no overt composition other than the limits set by the perpendicular position of the camera and the field of view of the particular focal length. Overlap is inevitable and encouraged.

For me, this is a vital component in striving to produce perceptual legibility. A performative photography, expressed through instruction, for example, is a way to assert the landscape not as a solely visual outcome, but as a processual and experiential one, too. In my case, the instructions are nearly impossible to be fulfilled, meaning chance and spontaneity erupt out of (dis)order, disrupting the static in favour of the unpredictable. Road closures, out-of-date GPS assignments, carelessness on my part, multiple events all occur in the making and of the moment. The landscape, then, is reflected as a dynamic entity, revealed through the experimentation and ad-hoc arrangements necessary when the instruction (inevitably) fails. Recall from the Introduction how I framed my mode of artistic research as a "performative paradigm," which artist and theorist Barbara Bolt says transcends representation and instead functions like an action that shapes and influences the world.[423] Bolt labeled this as a set of "movements," actions that have real-world effects. When adapted to photography, the photo is more than just a representation; it is also a cue to shape perception, emotion, and experience.

420 Margaret Iversen, "Auto-Maticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography," *Art History* 32, no. 5 (November 2009): 836-851.

421 Iversen, "Auto-Maticity," 840.

422 Iversen, "Auto-Maticity," 840.

423 Barbara Bolt, "Artistic Research: A Performative Paradigm?," *Parse Journal*, no. 3 (2016): 129-142.

A FETISH OF VISIBILITY

The topographic photograph portrays a surface, which at first glance appears as smooth. Logistics requires a continuity of landscape, a seemingly unending sequence of space that flattens any hiccups. Photography has the potential to intervene into this smooth-ness, not as an agent of stasis, but, as geographer Doreen Massey considers, a "dynamic simultaneity" that cuts a slice through time, enabling stories to spiral out of the landscape.[424] The British filmmaker Patrick Keiller, known most notably for his "Robinson" trilogy, decries the lack of visibility of an industrial economy that by and large remains invisible to most Britons, paralleling certain conditions in Rotterdam [Fig.37]. In his films, Keiller establishes a fetish of visibility in a landscape manufactured out of invisible processes like financialization, speculation, and the manufacture of goods for export.[425] For me, Keiller's attentive viewing turns emphasis back onto the commodity and the entangled social relations as a way to see the material signs of the economy, rather than solely focusing on the processes of commodity movement.

Keiller's milieu is similar to mine, yet we are visually divergent. His films confront the smoothing and flattening tendencies of economic landscapes, to which he responds in relevant and appropriate ways. Keiller once remarked that he considered his images as "a variety of stone-carving," implicating the materiality of the filmic as integral to comprehending the subject matter as much as its narrative.[426] His films are essentially composed like photographs, long drawn-out sequences where the only movement happens in-camera. As static frames, they force attention to the surface of the image, a potent reminder that everything has a material base, regardless of its retreat into invisibility. The first instalment in the trilogy, *London*, features the fictional character Robinson as narrator, tasked with navigating the UK's political and economic landscape. In it, Robinson describes himself as a materialist, recounting "that if he looked at it hard enough, he could cause the surface of the city to reveal to him the molecular basis of historical events, and in this way, he hoped to see into the future."[427]

Keiller's films, then, are a form of topography: viewing the materiality of the filmic experience simultaneously reveals the topography of the landscape, collapsing human life into the spatial and topographic ensuring that the political and social structures that manufacture such space is forever seen.[428] While at first glance Keiller's sequence of frames suggests a linear progression, reinforcing the continuity of landscape, Massey suggests that his films produce space marked by a constellation of locations in a larger landscape that are cumulatively constructed so we can piece the landscape together.[429] In my view, what unites Keiller's films and my topographic photographs are their alternating rhythm between panorama and detail. The camera is not so concerned with lingering on a wide vista, producing a conventional landscape picture, but on the accumulation of a series of distinct and sometimes related histories. The overlap is that each photograph has a

424 Doreen Massey, "Landscape/space/politics: an essay," *The Future of Landscape and the Moving Image*, accessed March 1, 2024, https://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/.

425 Andrew Burke, "Nation, Landscape, and Nostalgia in Patrick Keiller's Robinson in Space," *Historical Materialism* 14, no. 1 (2006): 25.

426 Patrick Keiller, "Landscape and Cinematography," *Cultural Geographies* 16 (2009), 412.

427 Patrick Keiller, *London* (British Film Institute and Koninck Studios, 1994), DVD.

428 Jeff Malpas and Keith Jacobs, "Place, Space, and Capital: The Landscapes of Patrick Keiller," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 6 (2016): 1145.

429 Massey, "Landscape/space/politics."

430 Tanya Agathocleous, "Postcards from the Apocalypse: Patrick Keiller's London and the Legacies of Victorian Realism," *Visual Culture in Britain* 17, no. 3 (2016): 252.

431 Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

432 Smithson, "Monuments of Passaic," 68-74.

433 Robert Smithson, "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 52-60.

434 Greg Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere: New Topographics and Art of the 1970s," in *Reframing the New Topographics*, *eds.* Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), 62.

435 Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 54-55.

[Fig.37]

myriad of details contained within a whole, emphasizing the local and fragmentary, where "individual frames of everyday life [...] must be observed minutely so a bigger picture might come into view."[430] What Keiller reveals to me is a method of detailed and cumulative knowledge, suggesting the logistical landscape as a totality, while disavowing that totality to ever come to fruition.

436 Robert Adams, *The New West* (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press, 1974), xii, quoted in Foster-Rice, "Systems Everywhere," 62.

GRIDS AND SERIALITY

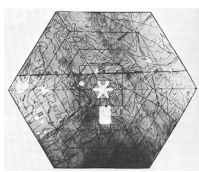
Grids and seriality are crucial to the topographic photograph. Together, they invite an inspection of pixels to see (and contest) the official landscape: how it is shaped, formed, utilized, controlled, and influenced by logistics. Topographical scrutiny of the photograph's surface also reveals its parallel referent of the logistical landscape. A union of geography and photography is formed, where the material circumstances of each are altered, and alter each other. Arranging the thousands of topographic photographs via seriality and the grid exposes latent inconsistencies, disruptions, interruptions, and possible anomalies from this seemingly uniform and controlled landscape, producing an intervention into the smooth excess of logistics.

But first, a short introduction to the grid, which has a long and associated history with various artists and photographers. Notably, late 19th century British photographer Eadward Muybridge used the grid to present his time and motion studies, ordering pictures in a literal transcription of time [Fig.38].[431] Robert Smithson was fascinated by the grid in multiple outings, such as in the arrangement of his aforementioned "monuments" in *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* [Fig.39].[432] In a different essay, "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site," Smithson plots the geography of the USA as an entangled configuration of gridded lines manifested through transportation, surveying, and vision systems [Fig.40].[433] The New Topographics also deployed usage of the grid, significantly the German photography duo Bernd and Hilla Becher, whose use of arranging was a way to destabilize any one individual picture. Their grid construction alludes to the system as a whole, demanding scrutiny and comparison with their typologies [Fig.41].[434] New Topographic photographer Robert Adams used the grid in a less hierarchical way, preferring serial progression to the Bechers's compilation. For example, he cautiously and deliberately sequenced photographs from his publication *The New West* to follow strict categorization: from east to west, starting with the Prairies, Tracts and Mobile Homes, The City, Foothills, and Mountains [Figs.42, 43, 44].[435] Like the Bechers's work, such composition hints towards the systematic, creating a visual ecology that assembles the bits into a record of what Adams has stated represents "the whole geography, natural and man-made."[436]

While a grid may mirror the idea of a map, a representational schema to orient oneself, the grids containing the topographic photograph are its inverse, a map that only the individual has the key to decipher. A presumption when

[Fig.38]

[Fig.39]



[Fig.40]

[Fig.41]

MIS

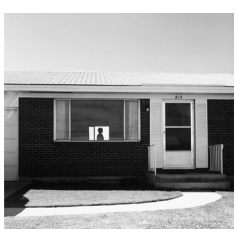
#02

437 Britt Salvesen, "New Topographics," in *New Topographics*, by Robert Adams et al. (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona; Rochester, NY: George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film; Göttingen: Steidl, 2013), 11.

first looking at these grids is their mimicking of the stark logistical horizon, a continuity that stretches left to right, or the other way round. While the horizontal dominates, just like in a logistical landscape, the grid can also be read along its vertical axis, up and down, from one side to the other. They have no beginning, nor end. Each grid has multiple entry points, and it is up to the viewer to discern their own path. Every time I look anew, it could be the single frame as a starting point, or a particular strip, a block of colour or other similar patterns, like shifts in scale or texture. The grid is spatial. Reframing your body in proximate location to the photographs reveals a different story up-close compared to the one that appears after taking a few paces back. Details in the topographic photograph emerge, merge, and compound to form larger sets of new, differing sections, repeated again and again. But a grid is not just comprised of a series of individual photographs in a cohesive structure. The seams between each of the discrete pictures are indexes of how I chose to construct the grid. The in-between spaces are animated sections of time, sliced away voids of unseen movements, time, and spaces. These gaps register the photographic process itself, illuminating their making and not-making, highlighting the role of the human in their production.

[Fig.42]

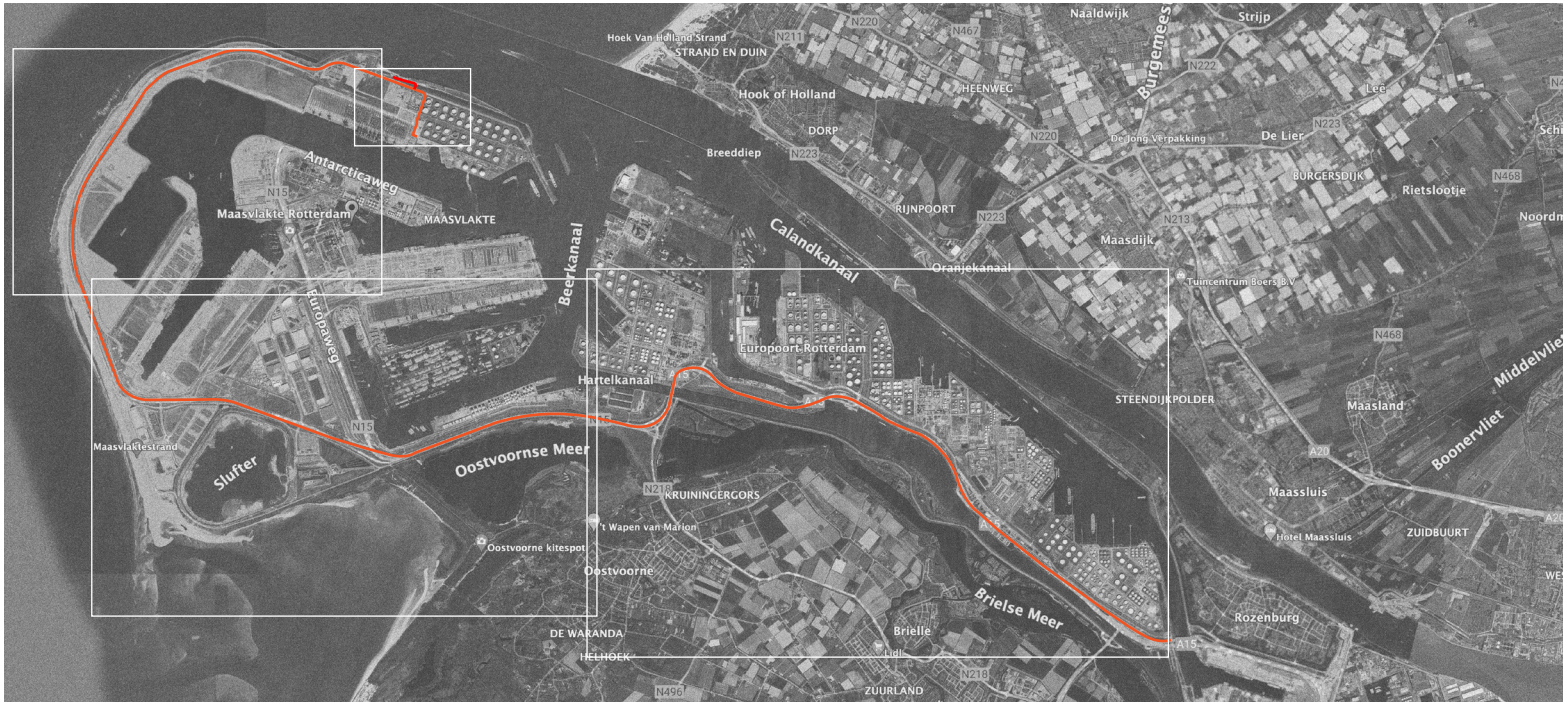
[Fig.43]



[Fig.44]

The layout of a grid means each discrete photograph is reliant upon its neighbour, creating an encircling view that defines the site more fully, rather than the singular, direct-ahead perspective common to landscape photography. The single photograph — for so long the apotheosis of landscape aesthetics — is an inappropriate tool in the logistical landscape. For Frank Gohlke, another New Topographics photographer, the serial format is a way to seek out details in individual pictures, "the series is what gives the individual photograph its interest, although parking lots for example are interesting in themselves because there is variation. Tiny details within them become very interesting."[437] It is an invitation to attentive viewing, a form of comparative analysis that solicits scrutiny for a thorough look at the hidden aspects of landscape. Seriality, paradoxically, is a way to entertain oneself within the minutiae of the singular photo. Gohlke notes serialization encourages the viewer to pry open the subtleties and differences from picture to picture, site to site. It is a double act of topographical revelation: first through the photograph's reproduction in camera, then followed by the viewer's gaze. Eventually, relations are laid bare; with naked exposure comes comprehension of landscape.

Seriality mimics the condition of the topographic photograph's making. Because a significant portion of any experience with the Port is made by car (it's auto-maticity), I can only ever glean the site in a series of furtive glances as I drive, the repetitiousness of which compounds into one vision. That is, the singular view is comprised of a series of infinite glimpses, not a static one-off. When serialized, the topographic photograph slips in and out of concreteness and abstraction: here are the rusted streaks defacing the side of a passing train, while here sits the infrastructure of transportation, gradually unspooling to reveal the overlaps of the maritime economy's intricate relationship to earth. Details can be taken apart to recreate a different configuration. New landscapes form and details overlap.



Route 02 - overview of all sections

MIS #02

Route:
Drive the entirety of Maasvlakteweg,
ending at the point where Customs
officers hassled you.

Task:
If the Smickel Inn
is open,
get a snack.

Distance:
22 km

Route 02

MIS #02

Kuiphaven
Slufter
Oostvoornse Meer
Oostvoorne kitesport
EVERGREEN
EVERGREEN

Route 02

Route 02

MIS #02

Route 02

Just as the instructions I noted earlier invite moments of unpredictability in a landscape of prediction, so too does chance, foresight, and a playful release of one's expectations of what to expect from a photograph render a new way of experiencing the logistical landscape. "Drifting" across the grid and scanning the serialized photographs is an encouragement to not see the Port of Rotterdam as it perceives itself, allowing the individual to have their own, private relationship to the Port, producing an infinite array of ways of seeing the same thing as novel.[438] A serialized grid is not didactic, telling how the view should be considered — that is what *FutureLand* is for — but a serialized grid does suggest there are multiple ways of viewing the Port external to the officially presented view.

438 Nato Thompson, "In Two Directions: Geography as Art, Art as Geography," in *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House; New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), 16-17.

439 On the role of photography to service geologic and military purposes, see: Henrik Gustafsson, "Foresight, Hindsight and State Secrecy in the American West: The Geopolitical Aesthetics of Trevor Paglen," *Journal of Visual Culture* 12, no. 1 (2013): 163. For Krauss's quote, see: Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal* 42, no. 4 (1982): 311-319.

440 Phyllis Lambert and Richard Pare, eds., *Photography and Architecture: 1839-1939* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1982).

LANDSCAPE OR VIEW?

The topographic photograph does not exist in its own vacuum but is just another layer in a dense strata of photographic sediment that has accrued over time, nearly since the invention of the medium. Jumping back in time 150 or so years finds us in the heat and pulverized dust of the American West, high up on some rocky plinth with an extended view across a placid lake. Puncturing this liquid calm is an errant geological fragment of volcanic rupture, a conical semi-mountain which rightly draws all the attention. We are in Nevada at Pyramid Lake in 1868. This scene would be photographed by Timothy O'Sullivan, official photographer for the *United States Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel*, whose photograph *Tufa Domes, Pyramid Lake, Nevada* would be reproduced ten years later in Clarence King's *Systematic Geology* of 1878 [Fig.45]. The topographic photograph's heritage can be traced back to this era, when photographers were commonly employed to document the vast hinterland of the western United States for both geologic and military purposes, ambivalent to the scene as a picturesque landscape to be admired, but instead there to create a geologic record where, according to American art historian Rosalind Krauss, such "fanatical descriptive clarity has bestowed on the bodies of these rocks a hallucinatory wealth of detail, so that each crevice, each granular trace of the original volcanic heat finds its record."[439] These American survey photographers were not the only ones practicing photography as an instrumental process at this time. Recall Chapter 3, where I introduced a set of practices that deployed photography's utilitarian aspects. For example, about a decade prior to King's Survey, as it was colloquially known, France's *Mission heliographique* of 1851 produced hundreds of negatives of the nation's architectural patrimony [Fig.46].[440]

[Fig.45]

[Fig.46]

Krauss, in her previous quote, refers to the evidentiary nature of the photograph in its ability to present "fantastical descriptive clarity" and a "hallucinatory wealth of detail." This, to me, is informational. The paradox is that in all this hallucination of detail that modern camera technology (and apparently 150-year-old technology) contains, the logistical landscape resists shedding any detail at all because it is viewed from a distance which dissolves

visible matter into a mirage or illusion, out of reach and beyond any scrutable sight. The topographic photograph is a method, or at least an attempt, at penetrating the privilege of logistics, which is simultaneously present while remaining securely out of sight. So, while the topographical photograph is comprised of deposits of raw information, what's contained within these deposits are what Norwegian visual culture scholar Henrik Gustafsson claims are the limits of vision — what can and cannot be seen.[441]

In Chapter 3, I wrote how Krauss distinguishes photography's discursive spaces, offering up "landscapes" and "views" as a way of understanding the passage of photographic information across different contexts.[442] I adopt her position as it relies upon simultaneous considerations for photography: its informational capacity and its distribution in various discursive spaces. Photography, for Krauss, has predilections for art and expression, and yet it may also service the scientific or documentary, staying close to its evidentiary function. Returning to O'Sullivan and his 1868 photograph *Tufa Domes, Pyramid Lake, Nevada* and its subsequent reproduction as a lithograph in Clarence King's 1878 geological publication, Krauss describes O'Sullivan's original in strikingly vivid detail:

> Despite all this, the rocks seem unreal and the space dreamlike, the tufa domes appear as if suspended in a luminous ether, unbounded and directionless. The brilliance of this undifferentiated ground, in which water and sky connect in an almost seamless continuum, overpowers the material objects within it, so that if the rocks seem to float, to hover, they do so as shape merely. The luminous ground overmasters their bulk, making them instead, the functions of design. The mysterious beauty of the image is in this opulent flattening of its space.[443]

She follows this up by suggesting that the lithograph reproduced a decade later in 1878 is an "object of insistent visual banality," yet appropriate for its context as a factual and specific geological formation.[444] The split, Krauss acknowledges, is that photography has two possibilities: either a "view," or a "landscape." There is no sharp distinction between these two entities, recognizing that the same photograph may experience categorical slippage and "operate as representations within two separate discursive spaces, as members of two different discourses."[445] Displaced into varied contexts, the photograph operates very differently. Tracing the path of O'Sullivan's photograph, it can offer itself as a popular view, a scientific record, or a landscape included in a museum exhibit. However, as Krauss argues, photographs are not fully free to roam and accumulate identities without consequence. Once the photograph gets assimilated into other discourses outside their origin, their intention and meanings become twisted and severed from their original status.

The view adheres to factual accuracy and topographical precision (and cir-

441 Gustafsson, "Foresight, Hindsight," 156.

442 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 311-312.

443 O'Sullivan's image first appeared in King's Survey, see: Clarence King, *Systematic Geology*, vol. 1 of *Professional Papers of the Engineer Department U.S. Army*, 7 vols. & atlas (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1877-78). For Krauss's quote, see: Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 311.

444 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 311.

445 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 311.

culatory diffusion), while the landscape succumbs to what Krauss calls its "exhibitionality"; pictures that are composed and conceived of, for example, as an object to be displayed on a wall within a specific setting.[446] Such a distinction is a reminder that my research is sliced into various discursive functions, and that landscapes depend on views. Views are created instead of landscapes, technical inscriptions of land rather than sublime indicators of unclaimed nature — and the artist's power — to impose subjective will over the site. The photographs I present in this chapter are akin to a topographical field report, not out of any sense of irony or detachment, but out of necessity and reality. While the topographic photograph is a genealogical descendent of O'Sullivan and his cohort, adhering to surface matter and undertaken for the purposes of expedition and survey, there is a critical split.[447]

Here, I point out the troubling notion that the photographs produced under the auspices of various surveys, like O'Sullivan's, contributed to the reconceptualization of the American West as a colonial enterprise, where depictions of the frontier created conditions for expansion and settlement, otherwise known as Manifest Destiny.[448] American author Rebecca Solnit links the intersection of photography, technology, and the ideological forces of expansionism.[449] Exploring Muybridge, a contemporary of O'Sullivan and one of the premier survey photographers of the American West, Solnit details how his innovative contributions to photography not only advanced visual representation but also played a key role in the commodification of the West. His work, and that of other survey photographers, was emblematic of the era's technological advancements that also mirrored the official narrative of the West as a space to be conquered and tamed, framing it as a landscape (view, in Krauss's parlance) ripe for exploitation and extraction. Solnit makes a convincing case for interlocking the narrative of photography's technological innovation and its index of truth as integral to westward colonial expansion. By claiming such genealogical heritage, this does not mean that the topographic photograph endorses this expansionist view. While the survey photographs were used as documents to map, claim, and expand the State's interest, the topographic photograph is used in a revelatory manner, countering the logistical urge for its own kind of colonial expansion and accumulation by dispossession.[450] The topographic photograph is one of consequences, showcasing in stark clarity and detail the traces of logistical systems and how they permeate and infest the landscape. While many survey photographs presented the land as stark and empty, the topographic photograph diverges from such pristine images of untouched nature and instead indicates the presence of what I discussed in Bureau Mission One as a "third nature," highlighting the technological, ecological, and mediated aspects of the logistical landscape.[451]

A MILLION PHOTOGRAPHS, A MILLION SUNSETS

The topographic photograph has other cousins and is not solely beholden to the 19th century "survey era." While temporally distant yet spatially

446 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 312.

447 Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces," 313.

448 Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

449 Solnit, *River of Shadows;* See also: Toby Jurovics, Carol M. Johnson, Glenn Willumson, and William F. Stapp, eds., *Framing the West: The Survey Photographs of Timothy H. O'Sullivan* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

450 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

451 Axel Goodbody, "Nature as a Cultural Project," in *Nature, Technology and Cultural Change in Twentieth-Century German Literature: New Perspectives in German Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

proximate to the photographers of the American West, Ed Ruscha's publications a century later capture some of the essence between views and landscapes, while also inaugurating the contemporary era of commercial futility that the New Topographics rendered so vividly. To name just a few examples, Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations, Every Building on the Sunset Strip,* and *Real Estate Opportunities* ask for the site's appearances to be examined, rather than dwelling, to paraphrase French literary theorist Roland Barthes, on photography's irretrievable past.[452] I introduce Ruscha as he fuses artistic production with a mechanized, or automated, role by pre-establishing certain guidelines for how his photographs would be made, relying on location to signify its meaning.

Previously in this chapter, I introduced Ruscha's performative notion of photography, referred to by art historian Margaret Iversen as "auto-maticity." Each book by Ruscha has a short, descriptive title, containing exactly what it promises. For his first publication, 1963's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations,* Ruscha stated that it was simply a play on words; he liked the sound of "gasoline" and the specific quantity, "twenty-six." [Fig.47]. Iversen refers to this as the "performative" structure of his books, which relies on instruction or rules that are followed through with a performance.[453] In *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*, Ruscha hired aerial photographer Art Alanis for ninety minutes of shooting time from a helicopter [Fig.48]. Ruscha would point out the parking lots he desired to be photographed, and Alanis would take the picture.[454] In another, perhaps his most recognized of the three mentioned works, Ruscha stood in the bed of his pick-up truck and traveled the length of Los Angeles's Sunset Strip, photographing the street with mechanized precision in a method he dubbed "motorized photography." He then collaged these photographs to produce *Every Building on the Sunset Strip,* an accordion-style photobook unfolding to 27-feet [Fig.49]. This spirit recalls the New Topographic photographer Lewis Baltz, who once said, "the ideal photographic document would appear to be without author or art."[455]

In my view, Ruscha presents a particular way of responding to the specifics of location to address the contemporary spatial moment, while mustering affection and appreciation for the everyday, even the official landscape.[456] It is clear Ruscha was never much concerned with the formal qualities of individual photographs; he considered photography "dead as a fine art," fit for informational purposes only.[457] This is exemplified in his photobooks, where Ruscha used rudimentary commercial-grade printing or the aforementioned outsourcing of mass-image production. New Topographic photographer John Schott astutely noted that Ruscha's photographs were "statements about art,"[458] and while that may be so, my emphasis is on Ruscha's voraciousness for documenting everything, displaying a fascinating commitment to empiricism. For example, appraise how he chose to caption those commercially photographed parking lots, with titles like *Lockheed Air Terminal, 2627 N. Hollywood Way, Burbank* or *Sears, Roebuck & Co., Bellingham & Hamlin, North Hollywood.* Even Ruscha's naming conventions — twenty-six gasoline stations; thirty-four parking lots; nine swimming pools, et cetera, all form a proto-relationship to the indexing and keywording of

452 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 77.

453 Iversen, "Auto-Maticity," 836-851.

454 Ed Ruscha, *Sears, Roebuck & Co., Bellingham, Hamlin, North Hollywood*, Tate Gallery, accessed February 29, 2024, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ruscha-sears-roebuck-co-bellingham-hamlin-north-hollywood-al00254.

455 Lewis Baltz, "The New West," in *Lewis Baltz: Texts* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2012), 33.

456 Finis Dunaway, "Beyond Wilderness: Robert Adams, New Topographics, and the Aesthetics of Ecological Citizenship," in *Reframing the New Topographics, eds.* Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), 42.

457 John Coplans, "Concerning Various Small Fires: Edward Ruscha Discusses His Perplexing Publications," *Artforum* 5 (February 1965): 24, quoted in Kevin Hatch, "Something Else: Ed Ruscha's Photographic Books," *October* 111 (Winter 2005): 109.

458 John Schott, quoted in John Rohrbach, "Introduction," in *Reframing the New Topographics, eds.* Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), xiii.

[Fig.47]

[Fig.48]

[Fig.49]

MIS

#02

machine vision.[459] This is a kind of homage to the indexical quality of the the photograph, a testament to nothing more than a record of its making.
But then look to his 1966 publication *Every Building on the Sunset Strip.* What ostensibly ended with the production of his 27-foot-long unfolding book, isn't really the whole story. *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* is not simply a singular artistic object. Not by any means. Ruscha, born in 1937, still, every few years, returns to the Sunset Strip and re-photographs it again and again (and again...). Not just thousands, nor even hundreds of thousands of photographs exist of this Strip; purportedly there are over *one million* photographs that Ruscha and his collaborators have taken since that first drive in 1966.[460] This is an ongoing work that transcends and outlasts the typical constraints of what an artwork is, bordering between fanatic evidence as much as data collection, a proto-Google Street View or even a persistent, yet intermittent, surveillance camera. At this point, I would say this project has exceeded Ruscha's, or any human's ability, to make sense of this massive repository, displacing artistic production with urban history and speculative futures. Los Angeles's Getty Institute has since started to digitize this enormous archive and make it accessible online; to date, the archive has over 65,000 photographs that catalogue the transformations of one of the city's most iconic streets.[461]

What I find fascinating about Ruscha's project is this transformation, which could ostensibly be considered a "view" for its commitment to painstakingly photographing every single meter of Sunset Boulevard and its subsequent transition into a "landscape." With such volume, Ruscha's photos of the Sunset Strip have been reconfigured as something beyond (or perhaps even because of) art, precisely because of the very thing that denies photography's consideration as an art: their "informative" function grounded in empiricism.[462] It is in this informative empiricism that Ruscha's corpulent archive has found its ultimate expression, and not, in my view, affiliated to a centuries-long classical system of representation.[463]

In 2021, Harvard landscape architecture professor Charles Waldheim convened a design studio around Ruscha's massive index, centring on Los Angeles's urban disparities and inequalities, by focusing on a pertinent issue for that city: shade [Fig.50].[464] Using Ruscha's thousands and thousands of photographs, students fed these images into a computational machine vision model to seek out patterns, relations, insights, and possible surprises to "[recognize] the precise visual composition of certain neighborhoods, structures of space, and building typologies—a task that exceeds human cognition."[465] Waldheim states that the sheer amount of images suggests, if not needs, new tools and technologies to uncover "an infinite number of latent Ruscha Sunset Boulevards" to reimagine an alternative Los Angeles.[466]

Ruscha's "engagement with photography reflects a sociological approach to the urban landscape,"[467] which is clearly evident by the myriad ways his enormous archive is being repurposed across multiple discursive spaces. Ultimately, his Sunset Strip archive showcases the relevance of photography's status as a document, able to capture a specific place and time. This is the possibility and hope I have for my topographical photograph: that in

459 Getty Research Institute, "LA Stories: Urbanism, Music, and AI in Ed Ruscha's Archive," YouTube video, 6:20, posted September 5, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-RQekFyxgE.

460 "Edward Ruscha Photographs of Sunset Boulevard and Hollywood Boulevard, 1965-2010," Getty Research Institute, accessed February 29, 2024, https://www.getty.edu/research/collections/collection/100001.

461 "12 Sunsets: Exploring Ed Ruscha's Archive," Getty Research Institute, accessed March 1, 2024, https://12sunsets.getty.edu/map/narrative?-mode=no-map&d=0.42256.

462 Allan Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (London: MACK, 2016), 10.

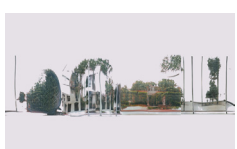
463 Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest, "Representation in Photography: The Competition with Painting," in *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective: Case Studies from Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 20.

464 Harvard Graduate School of Design, "Shading Sunset: Reimagining the Streets of Los Angeles for a Warmer Future," course description, Spring 2021.

465 Charles Shafaieh, "Shading Sunset: Charles Waldheim on Reimagining the Streets of Los Angeles for a Warmer Future," Harvard Graduate School of Design (website), April 19, 2021, accessed February 29, 2024, https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/2021/04/shading-sunset-charles-waldheim-on-reimagining-the-streets-of-los-angeles-for-a-warmer-future/.

466 Shafaieh, "Shading Sunset."

467 Sylvia Wolf, *Ed Ruscha and Photography* (New York: Steidl/Whitney Museum of American Art, 2004), 144.



[Fig.50]

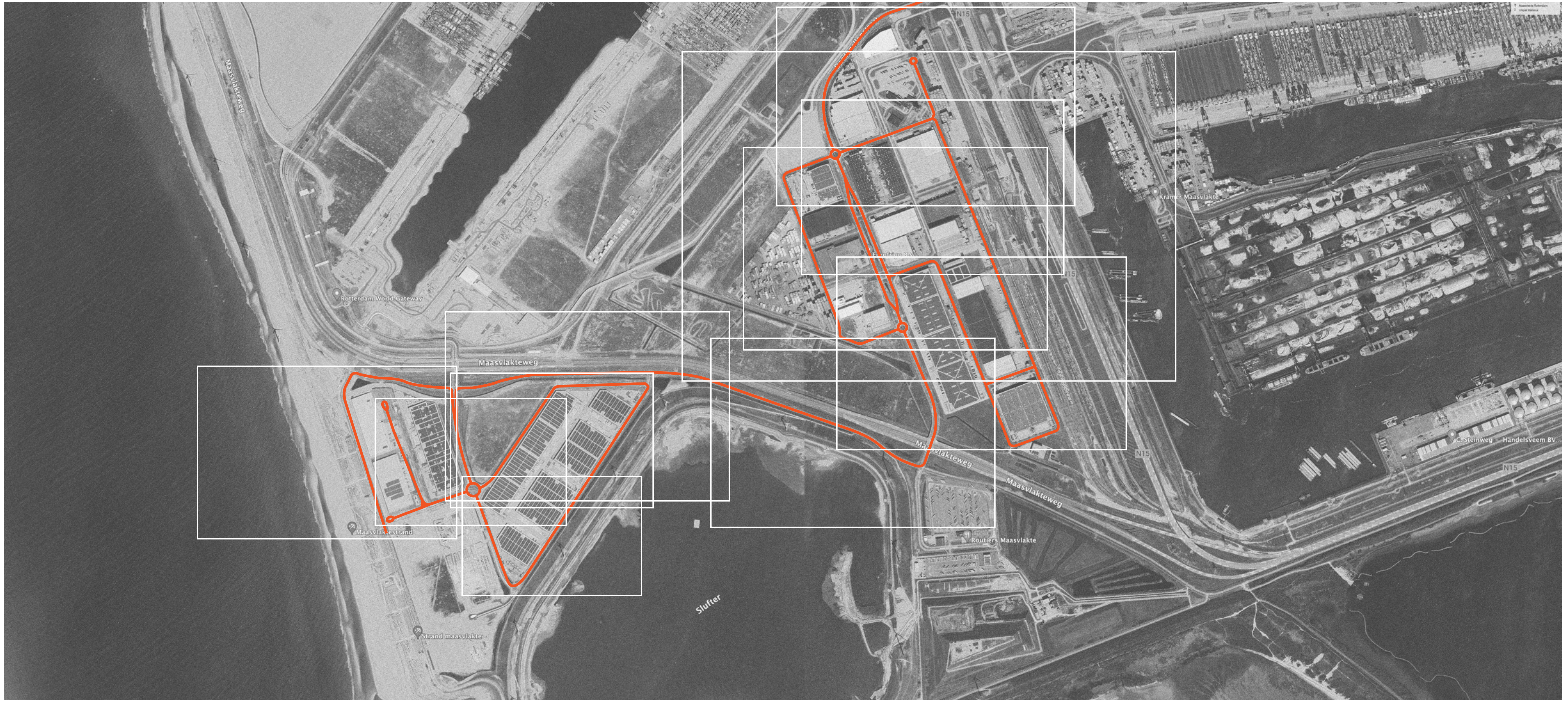
468 Wolf, *Ed Ruscha and Photography*, 468.

its promiscuous transition across various discursive spaces, something else other than appreciation occurs. But, I'll leave the final word to Ruscha, who says, in his familiar and deadpan way, "I have always operated on a kind of waste-retrieval method."[467] Me too.

BRINGING TOPOGRAPHY INTO SHARPER RELIEF

Looking closely, very closely, at these tiny pictures there is what appears to be a greater flow of imagery. You can see various textures and composition of weed and plant life, a variety of soil and sand, bleached grounds rustled out of their deep-time sleep beneath the North Sea to make new terminals and shipping quays, grease stains and oil marks, rusted streaks across ships, trucks, and trains, cracked concrete and various scrub struggling to encase discarded objects, flickers of refuse dotting the roadside, soda cans and cigarette packs probably flung from the windows of passing trucks, varied hues of blue and green and black congeal to make a colourful emporium of salted waterways, blackened train tracks slicing right across this reclaimed land from left to right, billowing sand drifting across the tar-stained highway, concrete abutments, warning signs indicating imminent death by shipping container without the appropriate safety measures taken, distant smokestacks belching steam and noxious fumes, steel-clad anonymous warehouses affixed with generic logos, painted arrows, lines, stripes and diagonal bars indicating traffic flows, more signs, rainbow coloured flags, COSCO, ONE, CMA CGM, and other shipping lines with and without capital letters, tiny pebbles that always find their way into the soles of shoes, lurching windmills whirring incessantly and only frozen by the camera, steel fences topped by barbwire, rusted locks with presumably lost keys, even the odd human, more than likely Polish or Bulgarian truck drivers wandering and catching a break, dandelions creeping out of the grass, distant ferries, the odd strip of bucolic grass featuring a retiree whizzing past on an e-bike, help wanted signs, rotting worms, locomotives, a few colours dominate: blue sky, a surprisingly verdant green punctuated by the odd weed patch, a thick navy blue seems to be the colour of maritime infrastructure, arrows pointing left, arrows optioning right, arrows pointing straight ahead, discarded Amazon Prime cardboard boxes, cracking asphalt, abandoned cars, sometimes with someone sleeping inside, deflated soccer balls, crushed Red Bull cans, empty mayonnaise packets fluttering in the wash of the giant windmills hovering above the snack bar, gas valves, storage pipes, bulbous tanks, piles of iron ore, a bus stop where the bus never stops, other cars emblazoned with SECURITAS or *Douanes*, W. Smit b.v., Neelevaart, Giant 7, Seawheel, puddles of dirty water, shark teeth, coils of steel cable, a few rusted out anchors the size of a small car, STOP, the sign says.

This is just a cursory glimpse from some of the 14,617 photographs that I accumulated driving through the Port. Compiled together, these are artifacts attesting to the veracity of the unnatural landscape, a collection of unremarkable scratches and surface treatments whose corpus tells a sto-



Route 03 - overview of all sections

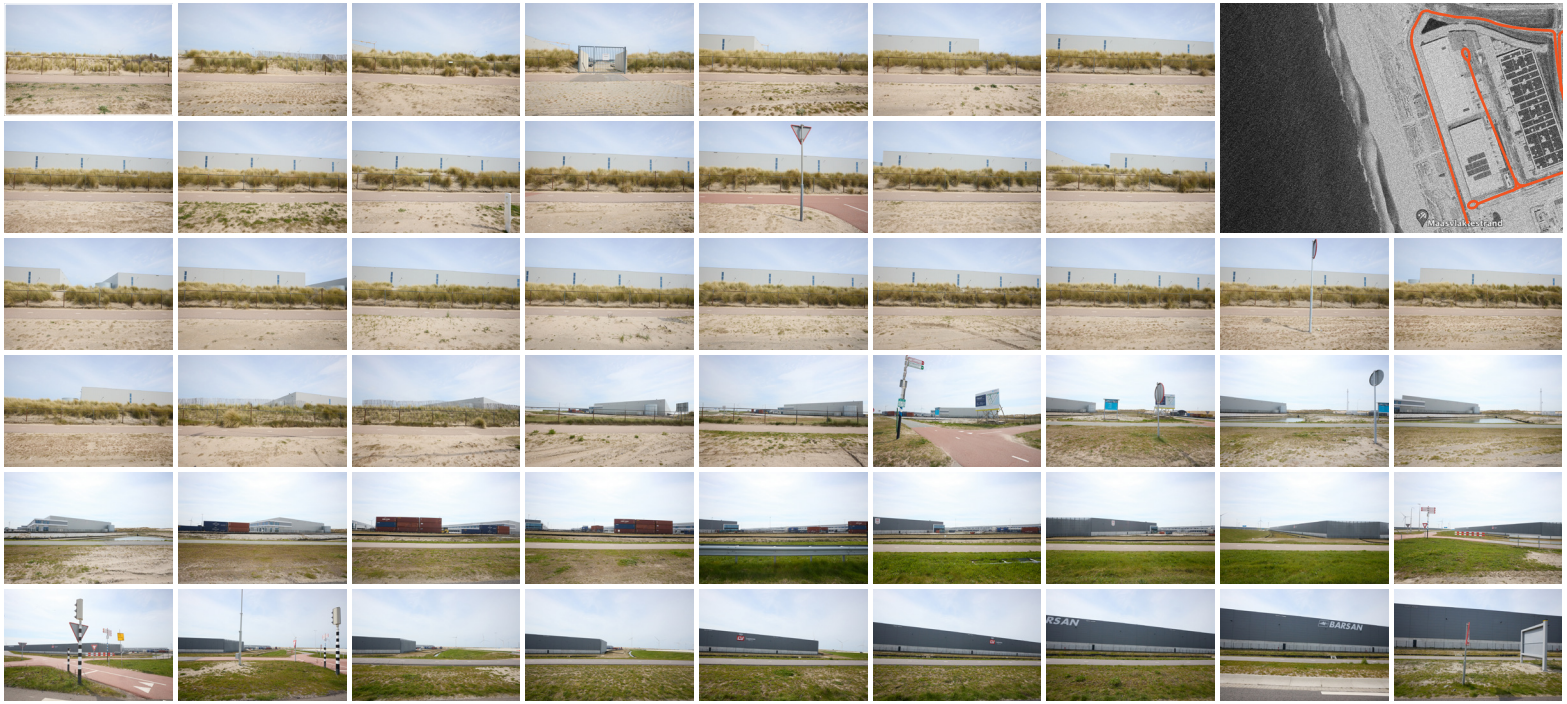
MIS

#02

Route:
Drive the entirety of the distripark, circling the Odin, Barsan, Neelevat and Nippon Express warehouses.

Task:
Use any available public road.

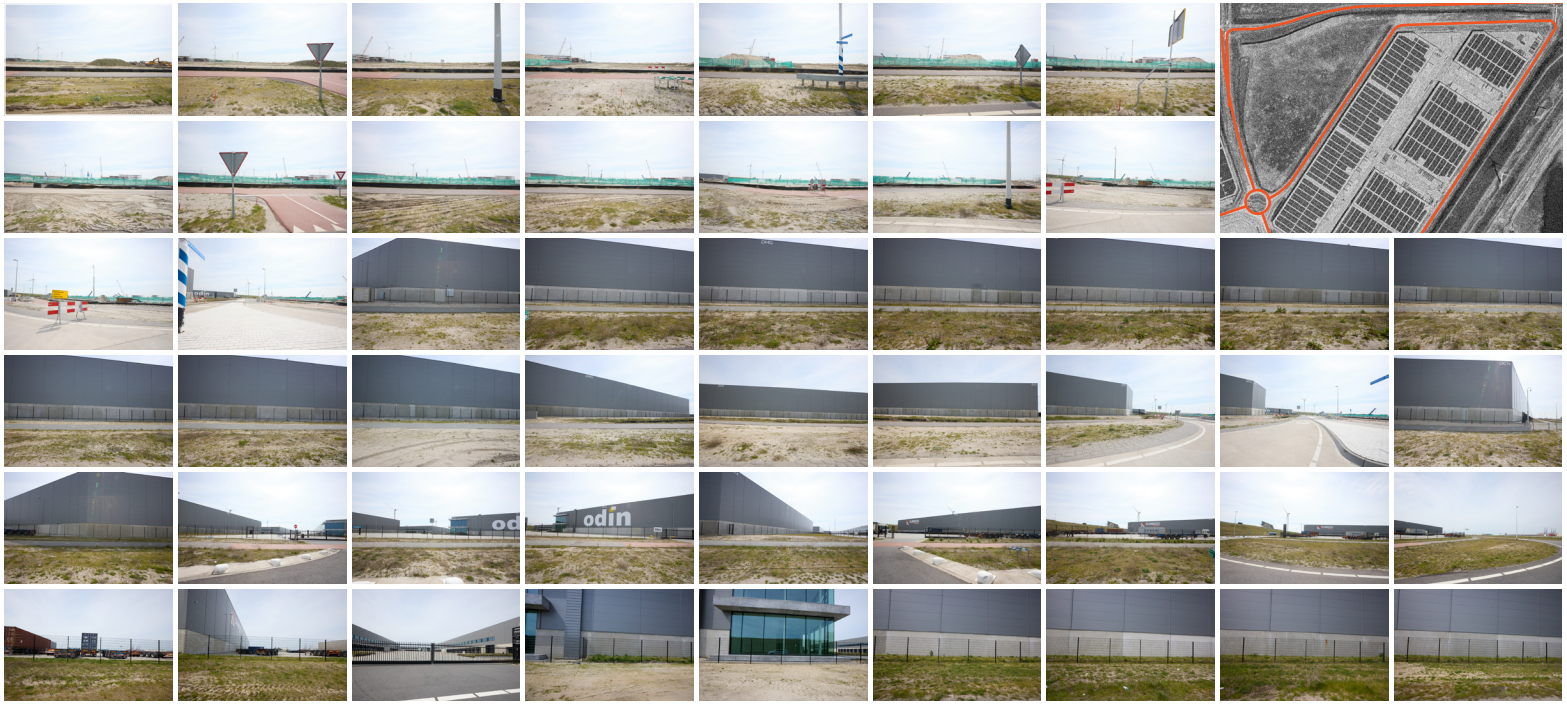
Distance:
12 km



Route 03

MIS #02

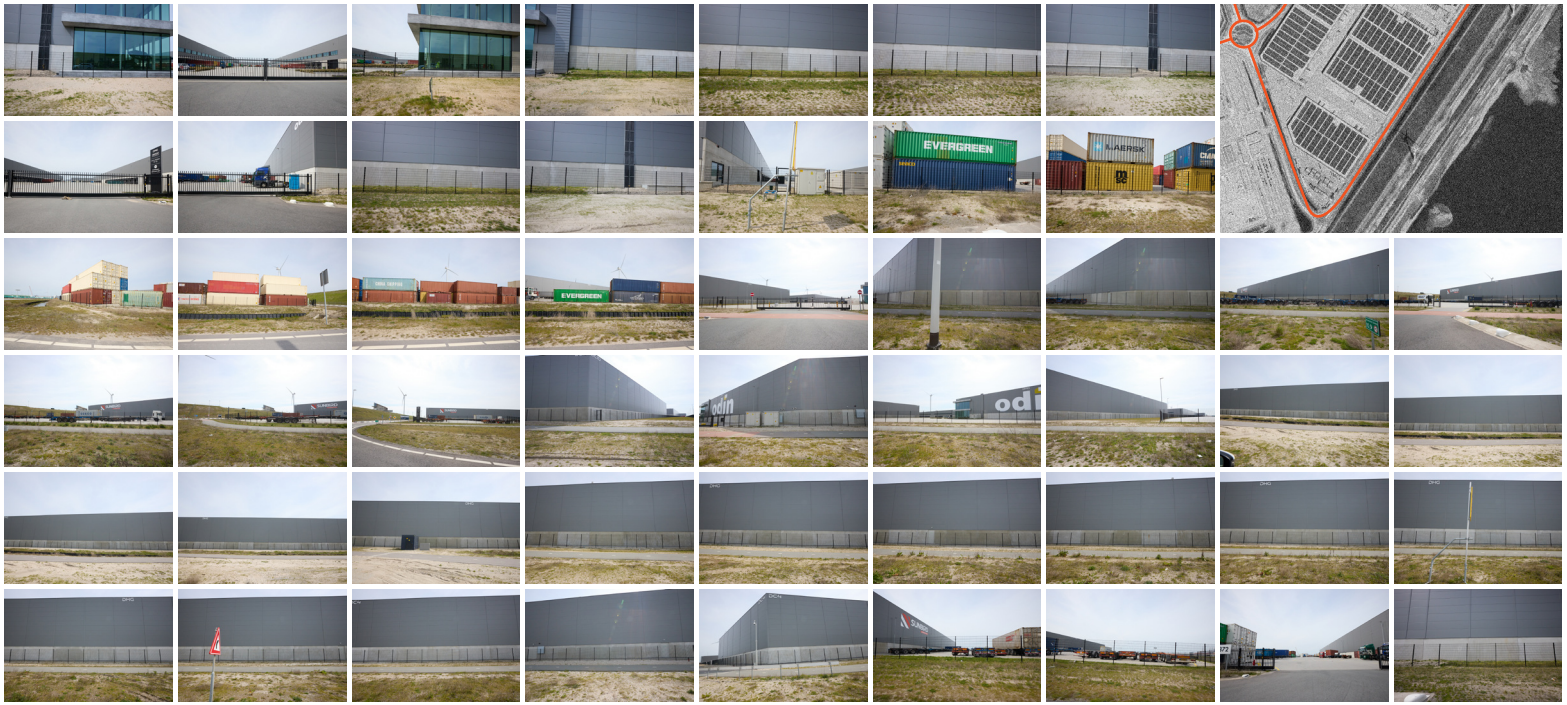
Route 03



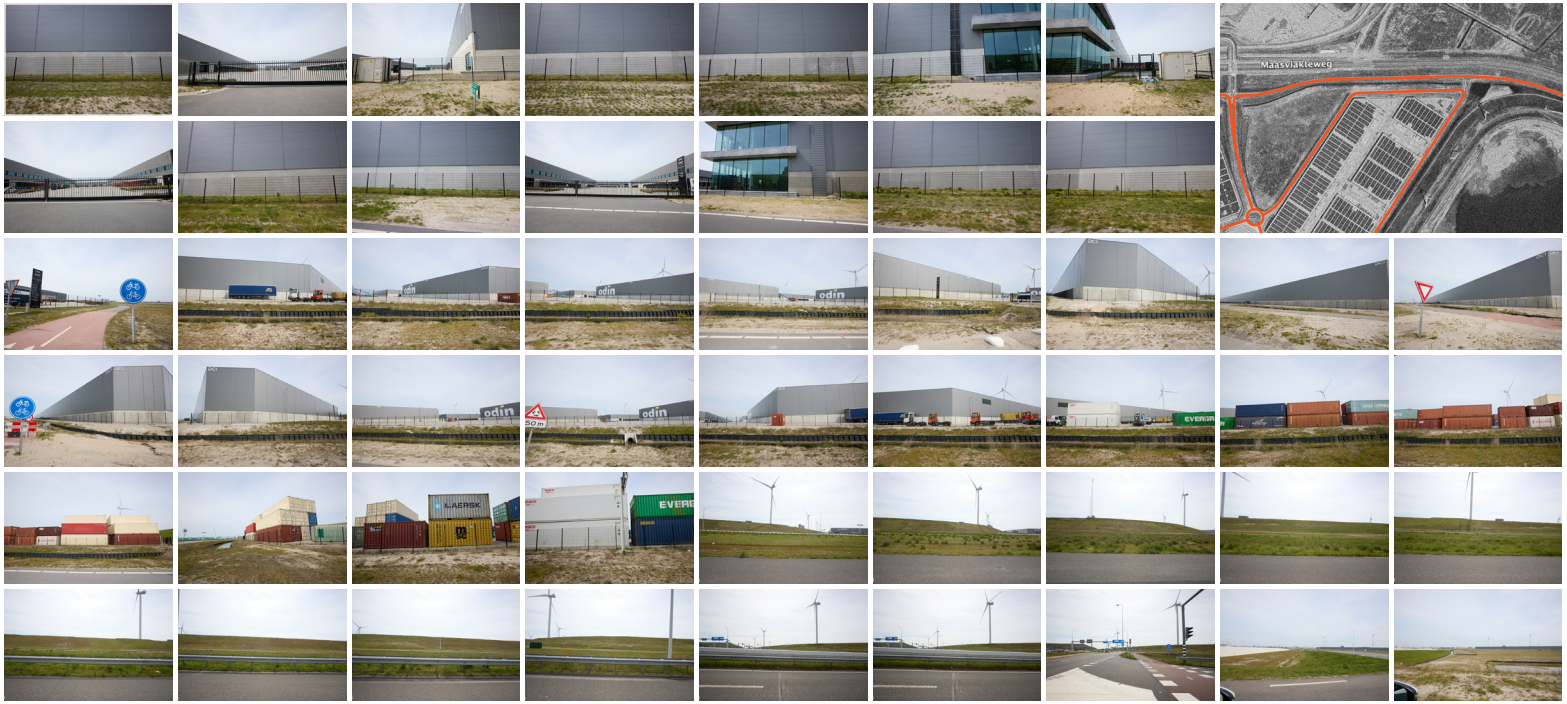
Route 03

MIS

#02

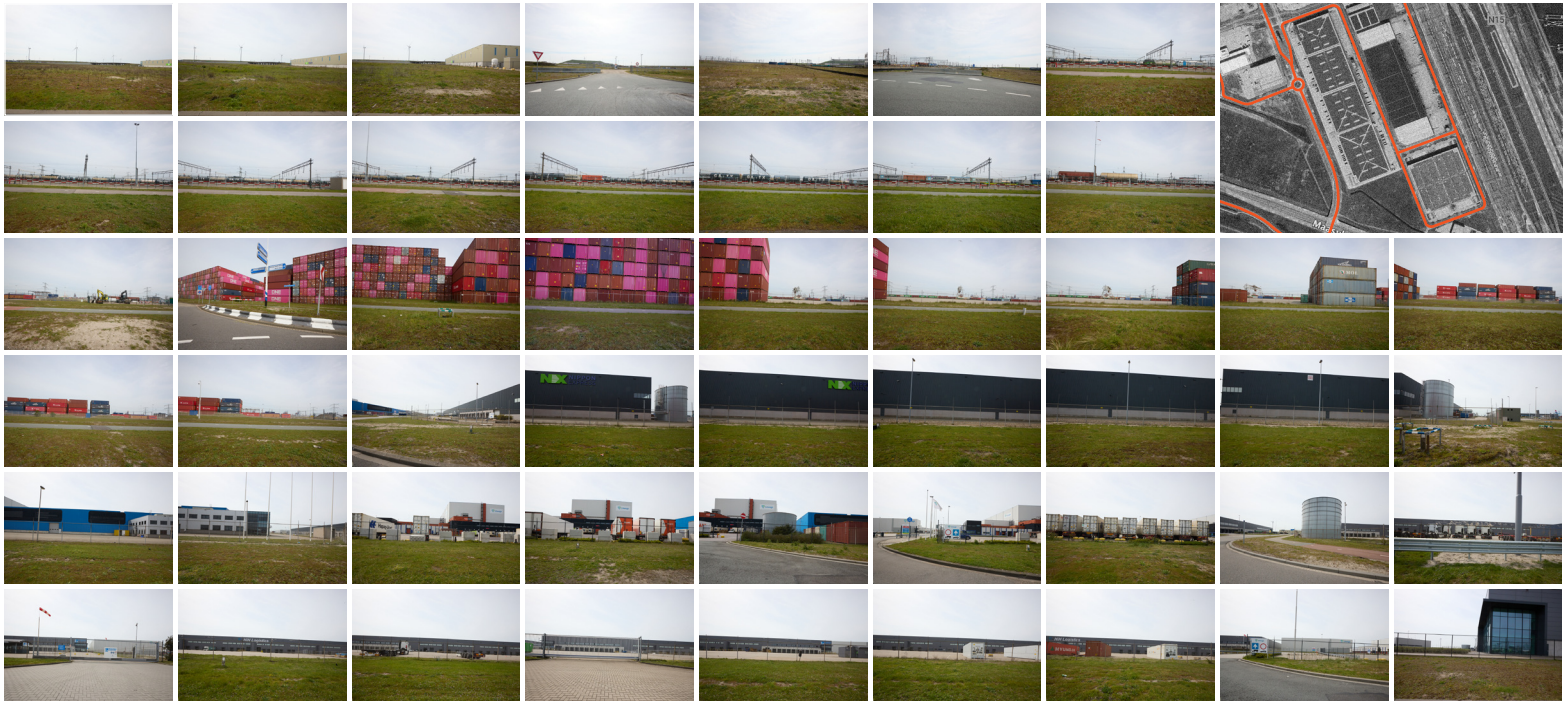


Route 03



Route 03

Route 03



Route 03

MIS #02

Route 03

Route 03

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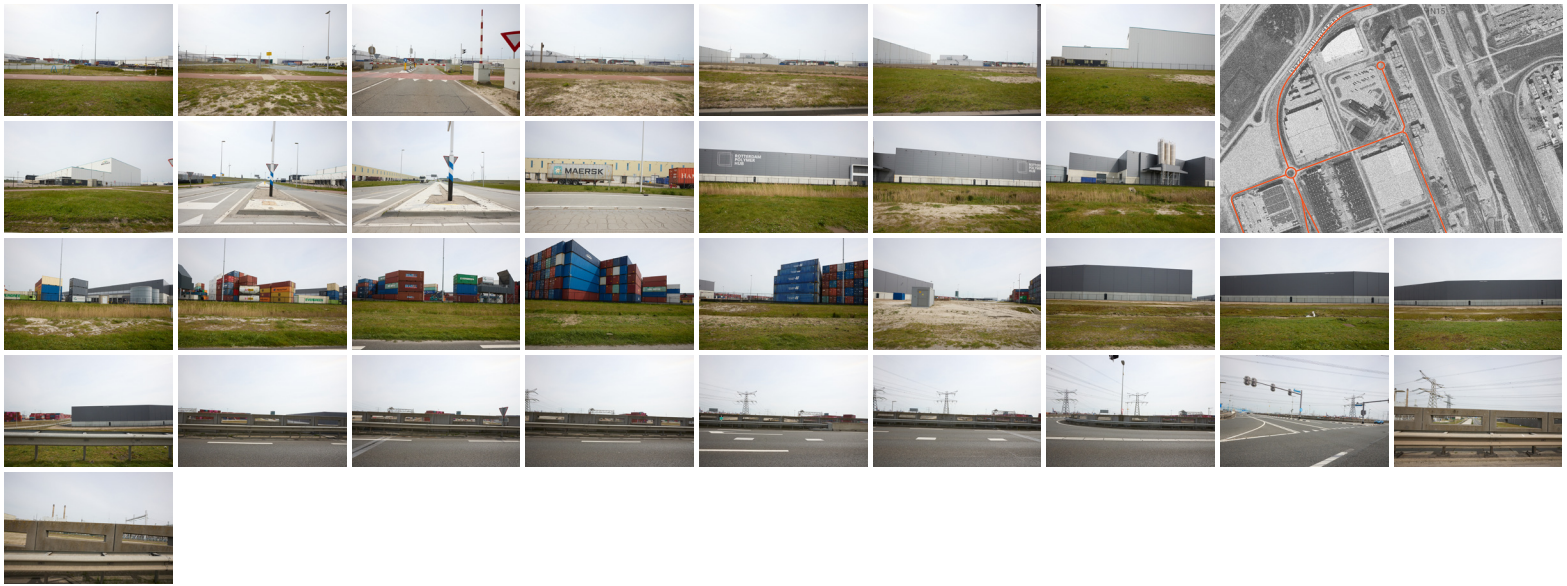
MIS #02



Route 03

ry that mostly remains guarded. Peering deeply into the topographic photograph, odd shapes come into sharper relief, concrete pads that could be parking lots or some kind of staging ground for industrial production, remnants of civil engineering designed to continually expand and lubricate land to extract as much as possible through the perpetual motion machine of logistics. The topographic photograph cannot be read as a single image contained by a frame but must be read as a chain of proximate partners that bleed beyond the frame and slip from one picture to the next to the next to the next. They are hints of other histories, layers, and conditions accruing information that points towards not only what is in view, but what exists beyond that view. Their visual quality are byproducts of a scanning movement across the material surface of logistics, enacted through an instruction and transposed into an image of itself. As neighbours, each topographic photograph re-forms a new horizon in which the "temporal and spatial relationships are collapsed."[469] The composition of thousands of discrete pictures heralds a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations, never singular nor monolithic. The piece is a sum of its parts, but the parts themselves are telling of the whole. Emphasis lies in serial repetition, leading to a comparative analysis of proximate pictures. Details come and go, associations formed and then abandoned. Scanning the surface of logistics leads one closer to scrutinizing the details that exists in each photograph, a compilation of the whole. They are simultaneously distant and up-close, mediators between the panorama and the detail.

469 Okwui Enwezor, "Exodus of the Dogs," in *Jo Ractliffe: Photographs: 1980s to Now*, (Göttingen: Steidl/The Walther Collection, 2020), 427.

It is so difficult in a logistical landscape to figure out where to look; either the scene is a spectacular sight, or it is so anonymized and mundane that it precludes any attention. The topographic photograph is a response to the anonymity of the logistical landscape. It asks the viewer to pay attention to the overly familiar — what is right in front of you — and to repeat that looking to hew out of the slick and smooth logistical landscape a materialized texture of place to counter its official presentation. The topographic photograph attempts to grasp the discrete parts in order to make the Port reveal itself from a distance. It is in the smaller moments, like the seemingly banal discovery of an oil slick impressed into the tarmac from an idling truck, that reclaim the intimate vision of the Port that distance steals. To scan the logistical landscape is fine, but as I drive, clicking away, it is in the steady pace of every click of the camera that restores the invisible in our imaginations back into a visible reality.

If the geograph of bureaucratic vision is a monolithic representation of logistics as fixed and naturalized, then in Bureau Mission Two I have shown that its companion is the topographic photograph which offers a counterpoint, a micro-dot of attainable information. This practice-led inquiry shows how a topographic photograph registers controlled space by indexing shape and a landscape's topographic condition, boring a recognizable hole into the "blockade" of bureaucratic vision. Bureaucratic vision being a visual manifestation of the site itself: distant, remote, and detached from the pursuit of everyday life. I have also shown how a topographic photograph, when brought into contact with the grid and seriality, is a sustained gaze into the official landscape where each of the sequential partners presents the fine

details and tiny inscriptions that are simultaneously embedded in the land and the photograph. The topographic photograph's priority is not to stand-out, but to elicit closer scrutiny and penetrate the "out-of-focus" and inchoate character of the site and draw it back into focus.

CONCLUSION: INTO PRACTICE

In conclusion, Bureau Mission Two introduced a method for how landscape photography, when re-oriented towards a topographical lens, may not only create a visual "record" of the Port of Rotterdam but can also dissect its bureaucratic and spatial imprints in order to reveal — make legible — the socio-economic relations that structure and shape such a site. I demonstrated how the topographical photograph is more than just a compilation of terrain, and how it considers surface as a rich resource containing an archive of seemingly disconnected industrial and infrastructural artifacts that become activated with attention and scrutiny. This kind of photograph is a fusion of geography and photography, treating landscape as simultaneously physical and informational. The topographic photograph established a foundation for how landscape photography may exceed the genre's conventional limits, and how it may function as a tool of legibility and interpretation to draw out the connections of geography, power, and visibility.

Bureau Mission Two serves as a pivotal transition into the remaining three chapters, where I introduce the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes*. There, I build out a framework that utilizes insights from the topographic approach to reimagine and intervene into an official landscape by integrating theoretical insight and practical application. The aim is to reconfigure interaction between landscape, photograph, and observer. The subsequent chapters advocate for landscape photography as a dynamic and extended medium, demonstrating its transformational possibility that not only depicts but actively participates in the landscape.

THE BUREAU OF OPERATIONAL LANDSCAPES

There is an image that has been consistently in my head ever since I started this photographic research. It starts simply, with me behind the wheel of a pick-up truck. The exact model I do not know, but it's definitely a two-seater, not some fancy Extendi-cab with four doors and plush seating. It is the economy model, which means it operates using a manual transmission, complete (or incomplete) with a basic trim package; the hubs of the wheel are not alloy, just the stock manufacturers model with a bit of flaking rust. The pick-up is white and has a bench seat. Beside me as I drive sits a Stetson-like hat on top of a safety vest, trimmed in reflective fabric. I presume I wear the vest so I don't get run over by cars or trucks as I stand on the side of the road.

In the bed of the truck sits a large box. Inside, there is a tripod; a fully graphite model produced by the Japanese camera supply company Gitzo. Neatly tucked into a foam berth is a camera and some lenses. The camera is an Arca Swiss RM-3Di, a technical camera that has multiple swing, tilt, and shift movements. Manufactured in Switzerland, it lives up to every Swiss cliché of precision and design. I've attached a small camera strap, a bit of colour to accompany the otherwise black metal body and aluminum mechanisms. There are three lenses of different focal lengths, all manufactured by Schneider-Kreuznach, a German company in business since 1913. Clipped onto the rear of the RM3Di, is an IQ150 digital back manufactured by the Phase One company of Denmark. It's an older model, but the sensor still produces a more-than-adequate photograph of around 50 megapixels. The digital back is equivalent to my pick-up truck: appropriate, sturdy, providing just enough mods and functions to get by; anything more is just showing off. This equipment, while still more than what most professional photographers of my ilk can possibly attain, is still rudimentary, which makes me think: I am out here driving in a base-line pick-up truck with specific equipment meant to produce a particular kind of photograph.

Still, in my dream, I stop the truck, pull over, and get out. Painted on the side of the door is a logo; its round, and, tracing along the outer edges, it says: BUREAU OF OPERATIONAL LANDSCAPES. Inside the circle, it looks like a stylized rendering of power lines, what could pass for a canal, or maybe it's a crane, the ones that look like giraffe skeletons, the kind used to unload and load container ships. I put on my hi-vis vest. On the breast pocket, under the PORT OF ROTTERDAM mission patch, it says TOPOGRAPHER. That must be my job title; I'm a topographer recording particular landscapes if my logo is at all correct. I pop on the hat; it's also emblazoned with the same logo, even an accompanying

patch with my name on it. I start organizing my camera, un-telescoping the tripod and preparing to make a photo.

In front of me, there is a little green sign about 60 cm off the ground, with the number 12.4 in white. I note that it's a mile-marker, dotted every 300 meters along this stretch of road. Every few seconds, a tractor trailer comes seething past. I am buffeted in their wake, nearly blown beyond the shoulder into oncoming traffic. The camera wobbles. I check the instructions in a little laminated handbook dangling from the tripod. Position the camera and yourself perpendicular to the road; point the camera out towards the horizon; open up the digital spirit level to ensure the little screen's horizon matches its mirrored inscription across the land; check the exposure, it only needs an averaging; use your thumb to deploy the red cable release mechanism; trip the shutter. Light has now entered the camera, flowing through the lens, searing itself onto the digital sensor. A picture has been made. Check the back of the camera to ensure a reasonable image is there. Looks fine, take another. A couple more, too, just to be sure. Time of capture: 8:42 pm. I leave, moving 300 meters to the next mile marker. Repeat.

This image appears in my head every time I go photographing, sometimes even when I am not. Somebody asked me when I told this story if I was LARP-ing, I said no (also because I don't know what that even means). It's all true. This is what I do.

CH 04

EXTRA-PHOTO-GRAPHIC: AN UNDIS-CIPLINED PRACTICE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the theoretical and practical foundation for the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes* by introducing a concept that I term "extra-photographic." The first three chapters addressed the broader conceptual questions of landscape and outlined the site of my research, with all its contingent issues and problems. Now, in the remaining three chapters, I operationalize these insights and propose a conceptual shift that emphasizes process over the finality of the photograph. I argue for the primacy of an interdisciplinary practice, utilizing sources from not just landscape photography but also from other practices ranging from site-specific art to cultural geography. A wider disciplinary association, I argue, addresses the "material consequences" of landscape to extract legibility from the social and economic relations that structure logistical landscapes.[470] By extending — or making additions to — the boundaries of conventional landscape photography practice, I can reframe it as an active and participatory medium. What I build throughout this chapter is foundational; by outlining in detail the parameters of the "extra-photographic," I seek to redefine my role as a photographer, as well as the role of the photograph and the landscape itself. That is, the principals I determine here form the operative infrastructure I introduce in the next chapter, orchestrating a set of practical values that not only document but alter its subject — the logistical landscape. I begin with a trajectory of practices and concepts that advocate for liminality in art, moving through a variety of examples to finally settle on my own definition that is specific to landscape photography: extra-photographic. This excursion sets up how such "liquid borders" are crucial in transforming my practice from a representational medium into a dynamic, processual one.

4.2 BEYOND REPRESENTATION: THE EXTRA-PHOTOGRAPHIC

In her publication *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Korean art historian Miwon Kwon identifies the characteristics of a liminal practice (in relation to site-specific art) as not belonging to one place or identity, but as a vagabond traveller moving across boundaries (disciplinary or otherwise) that adapts to varied contexts and meanings.[471] This approach eschews traditional notions of art's autonomy and commodification, relying instead on the particularities of a site, such as its social, economic, or political conditions.[472] The *Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI)* — a research and education organization that examines and interprets the human-altered landscape through a multidisciplinary approach — is exemplary of a liminal practice. I introduce the *CLUI* in Chapter 6 in a sustained and detailed examination, as they prove not only pivotal but aspirational in how I conceive, and direct, my own *Bureau of Operational Landscapes*. For now, I limit their presence to a few key examples here to argue my point. The *CLUI*'s liminality lies in its inability to be defined, resisting clear categorization as it straddles genres and disciplines. This amorphous quality is framed

470 Emily Eliza Scott, "Field Effects: 'Invisible-5's' Illumination of Peripheral Geographies," *Art Journal* 69, no. 4 (2010): 40.

471 Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

472 Kwon, *One Place after Another*.

by the *CLUI* founder Matthew Coolidge as "anthropogeomorphology," a homespun fusion that cuts across disciplines to scrutinize human-made marks of the earth's surface that reveal clues into cultural, geologic, political, and other concerns.[473] The *CLUI's* goal is "interpretive diversity," affording multiple methods and means to read, practice, and contest a variety of landscapes.[474]

The *CLUI*'s liminality is produced in the wake of such diversity, requiring them to draw upon a consortium of fields, disciplines, and methods while taking pleasure in exploring the holes and in-between spaces of disciplinary overlap. For example, their Land Use Database is an example of liminality in action.[475] The Database is a digital repository that regroups "the landscape into expressive parts," producing moments of diversity that hinge on unpredictable outcomes when human meets data.[476] Photography, cartography, and text are gathered within the Database, as documentation of the terrestrial system of land uses that sprawls across the USA, including vital entries like the Bingham Canyon Mine (the largest open-pit copper mine in the world) and the oddball Center of the World in Felicity, California.[477] The *CLUI*'s Database is liminal because it straddles informational acuity with artistic interpretation to engage viewers in a dialogue that is simultaneously interpretive and educational. I frame this as extra-artistic: the art object is extended to include its process over product, echoing Kwon's sentiment about art that is entwined with its context all the while intermingling with a wide array of sources to construct and display its content.[478] This extra-ness reflects Coolidge's desire for "creative collisions and juxtapositions that render new meanings and explanations," handled by an open-ended opportunity for any visitor to click through the Land Use Database to create their own journey of decoding American land mass, deployed as an act of what Coolidge frames as, for example, opportunities for inspiration, critique, or an activist's agenda.[479]

Extra-artistic practice adheres to Kwon's definition that the liminal seeks out intersections and leftover gaps when multiple fields and disciplines cross-pollinate.[480] Such disciplinary promiscuity calls into action non-artistic methods alongside artistic, tied into what American art critic and artist Brian Holmes calls "extradisciplinary investigations": a practice that transcends traditional artistic boundaries by intersecting with art, theory, and activism to instigate change in "an attempt to transform the initial discipline, to end its isolation, to open up new possibilities of expression, analysis, cooperation and commitment."[481]

This, says American artist Claire Pentecost, is what artists inherently possess: a freedom and experimentation in their production, which needs to be exercised as it dismantles hierarchies of artistic production and tradition. Expanding on Holmes's extradisciplinary concept, Pentecost urges the artist to take up the mantle of "public amateur," acting as a conduit "between specialized knowledge fields and other members of the public sphere." The public amateur bridges disciplinary gaps, be they academic or non-academic, or even fields that might otherwise appear unrelated.[482] The Slovenian designer and scholar Oliver Vodeb, writing about the linkages between documentary photography and visual communication design, calls for each discipline's realignment towards socially responsive communication, and

473 Aleksandra Jach, "Center for Land Use Interpretation: Interview with Matthew Coolidge," *The Anthropocene Index*, accessed February 14, 2024, https://theanthropocene-index.com/article/36-Center-for-Land-Use-Interpretation-Interview-with-Matthew-Coolidge.

474 Matthew Coolidge, "Introduction," in *Overlook: Exploring America's Internal Fringes with the Center for Land Use Interpretation*, ed. Matthew Coolidge and Sarah Simons (New York: Metropolis Books, 2006), 31.

475 "About the Database," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 20, 2024, https://clui.org/ludb.

476 Coolidge, "Introduction," 19.

477 For the Bingham Canyon Mine, see: "The Center for Land Use Interpretation," *Bingham Copper Pit, Utah*, accessed February 20, 2024, https://clui.org/ludb/site/bingham-copper-pit. For the centre of the world, see: "The Center for Land Use Interpretation," *Felicity, Center of the World, California*, accessed February 14, 2024, https://clui.org/ludb/site/felicity-center-world.

478 Kwon, *One Place after Another*.

479 Coolidge, "Introduction," 25.

480 Kwon, *One Place after Another*.

481 Brian Holmes, *Escape the Overcode: Activist Art in the Control Society* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2009).

482 Claire Pentecost, quoted in Emily Eliza Scott, "Undisciplined Geography: Notes from the Field of Contemporary Art," in *Geohumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place*, eds. Michael Dear, Jim Ketchum, Sarah Luria, and Douglas Richardson (London: Routledge, 2011), 51.

asks: "What if we realised that power manifests in realms beyond mere representation and that the real is actually socially constructed?" For Vodeb, such a practice must situate itself in everyday life, operating as relational to subvert the dominant ideologies sunk deep within disciplinary conventions. What Vodeb calls for, similar to Holmes and Pentecost, is a "radical intimacy" to create dialogue, or to at least create favourable conditions in which dialogue may occur.[483]

American curator Nato Thompson suggests how artists, when dwelling in a liminal state, can "[discover] new forms for conveying ideas or impulses."[484] As an example, he discusses the discipline of geography that, when made unruly and forced to act beyond its strict boundaries, can instigate new views and ways of engaging with particular sites. "The task of the geographer," says Thompson, "is to alert us to what is directly in front of us, while the task of the experimental geographer — an amalgam of scientist, artist and explorer — is to do so in a manner that deploys aesthetics, ambiguity, poetry, and a dash of empiricism."[485] Thompson is referring to Experimental Geography, a misfit methodological cousin to traditional geography designed to move between an array of discourses, without being limited to the various practices within geography proper. At its core, Experimental Geography, a term coined by American artist, photographer, and geographer Trevor Paglen, is a way of understanding human interaction with the land.[486] Its core idea is an expansive gathering of various methods and practices that stretches its tentacles into multiple media and mediums, inviting a surfeit of discourses into its house, from journalism to cartography to artistic practice. As Thompson has written, Experimental Geography is "a new lens to interpret a growing body of culturally inspired work that deals with human interaction with the land. That is to say, the work [...] gains more intellectual heft when interpreted with an understanding of both contemporary geography and contemporary art."[487]

My practice thrives in this shared pool of art and geography, sitting along an axis Thompson describes as a "poetic-didactic" construction that intersects with the "geologic-urban."[488] One disciplinary frame is not wide enough to contain the complexity of the endeavour. The only solution is to expand that frame or to combine it with others. Expanding the frame allows for other discourses to enter, and, as Thompson writes, "the mechanisms of power, finance, and geopolitical structures that produce the culture around us" are made palpable, visible, and legible.[489] What Experimental Geography, Holmes's extradisciplinary investigation, Pentecost's public amateur, and Vodeb's radical intimacy all avail is that by welcoming cross-disciplinarity and liminality, insights are gleaned from different realms to make the world more meaningful and legible, while simultaneously provoking critical insight into one's inherited artistic legacies.

Art historian Rosalind Krauss, in her groundbreaking dissection of late-1960s art *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, argued that contemporary sculpture evolved past its "historically bounded category" and expanded into a broader conceptual and physical space to negate its conventions and limitations. Krauss focused on sculpture and site-specific art, such as that done by artists like Robert Smithson, to illustrate how sculpture was inherently tied to the "monument."[490] However, she proceeds to explain how site-spe-

483 Oliver Vodeb, "Radical Intimacies: (Re) Designing the Impact of Documentary Photography," *Trigger* 1 (2019): 22.

484 Lauren Cornell, "Interview with Nato Thompson," quoted in Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," 51.

485 "Experimental Exhibitions," Independent Curators International website, quoted in Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," 51.

486 Nato Thompson, "In Two Directions: Geography as Art, Art as Geography," in *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House; New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), 13.

487 Thompson, "In Two Directions," 14.

488 Thompson, "In Two Directions," 14.

489 Thompson, "In Two Directions," 15.

490 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 34.

cific art ruptured this treatise and a new set of artistic possibilities arose, ones that embraced the spatial and environmental, and a merging rather than a separation between art and space. What Krauss practically lays out is an undisciplined artistic practice that moves beyond inherited conventions, and instead expands the once pre-established categories in favour of new, unexpected outcomes. She refers to such an evolution as a "post-medium condition."[491] Applied to landscape photography, which in my view has long been tied to the "monument" (the convention of the singular photograph, for example), this invites a blurring of disciplinary lines and thrusts the production of photographic work ahead of its outcome. I term this as "extra-photographic."

Extra-photographic is defined by two attributes. First, emphasis is placed on the "material consequences" of a particular site, recognizing the interconnectedness between physical locations and broader social or economic implications that arise from engaging with that space, rather than relying solely on artistic consumption and appreciation.[492] Nato Thompson notes that art practices engaged in such site-specific quests must include "an understanding of both contemporary geography and contemporary art."[493] Italian photography curator Marta Dahó calls for something similar, stating that photographic practices engaged in the geopolitical can no longer rely soley upon traditional landscape conventions. [494]

As I argue throughout Chapters 4, 5, and 6, emphasizing physical and topographical conditions forces one to brush up against a location's "brute reality," revealing the site's various relations through a process of enquiry rather than resting in the finality of its representation.[495] The extra-photographic, tied to land, focuses on the specifics of site in which practice surges beyond critique. Spatial politics is its subject, specifically, the transformations wrought by logistics, yet it is also combined "with a self-reflexivity that operates as a political agent in space."[496] This is the second condition of the extra-photographic. Alongside a land-centric focus, reflexivity is pivotal.

The extra-photographic is "operational," defying its medium specificity that claims to represent reality but which instead actively transforms reality through photographic practice.[497] The static mode of representation becomes replaced by a mode of process. "Operative," in my view, implies the transformative potential of photography, advocating for art as an active agent in particular social and economic contexts, like the logistical landscape.[498] That means physical landscapes can be altered by placing attention on specific subject matter and collaborating with social actors integral to the photograph's context. There is not so much an urge to reflect human experience and its relation to land but rather to actively construct and organize it. For example, alongside the production of landscape photography, I have developed various formats of diffusion: a site-based tour and a series of interpretive overlooks (which I address in detail in Bureau Mission Three), combining to unsettle conventional landscape photographic practice by upending reliance on the finality of representation. The extra-photographic unites a land-centric focus with reflexivity to form an operational alliance, merging photography into critical landscape practice, site-specific art, and discursive action to direct attention to the outside world rather than staying huddled within photography's own meta-insularity.

491 Rosalind Krauss, *Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999).

492 Scott, "Field Effects," 40.

493 Nato Thompson, "Contributions to a Resistant Visual Culture Glossary," *The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, accessed February 20, 2024, https://www.joaap.org/new3/thompson.html.

494 Marta Dahó, "Landscape and the Geographical Turn in Photographic Practice," *Photographies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 227-248.

495 Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

496 Scott, "Field Effects," 40.

497 Operative photography stems from the Soviet practice of Factography, which built on the idea that genres cannot be static or fixed but instead exist as praxis. See: Devin Fore, "Introduction," *October* 118 (Fall 2006): 3-4.

498 Fore, "Introduction," 3-10.

4.3 ROBERT SMITHSON: AN EXTRA-PHOTOGRAPHIC PROTOTYPE

To understand the extra-photographic as a multi-pronged affair that is tied to land use and disciplinary dissolution, the artist Robert Smithson is a relevant prototype. Smithson emphasized a process-based art that breathes out into the world as opposed to an object-based art that sits in a studio.[499] His perspective was influenced by recognizing how the contemporary spatial moment of his era (this would entail the late 1960s and early 1970s, ending at his death in 1973) was marked by pervasive industrialization that produced artificial landscapes, the natural aspects of which had long been erased. Smithson unravels how the intricacies of landscape, perception, and photography can induce transformative potential to reshape, for me, logistical land, offering a different lens on how to view and experience landscapes and their representations.

In 1967, *Artforum* reproduced Smithson's *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, a strange brew of site visit, field trip, photography, and sculpture, where he recounted his departure on the No. 30 bus from New York's Port Authority terminal to his rather dilapidated hometown of Passaic, New Jersey.[500] Equipped with his trusty Instamatic camera, the *New York Times*, and a newly purchased copy of the science fiction novel *Earthworks* ("about a soil shortage, and . . . the manufacture of artificial soil"), Smithson meandered this rusted-out town and started photographing bridges, oil derricks, and the concrete abutments of a new highway under construction. His essay and photographs reframe and comment on the derelict structures of New Jersey as a kind of parody of public art by calling these collapsing structures "monuments," while gently mocking the tropes of documentary and scientific positivism.[501] The demented travelogue he presents is an analogue to my own experiences of topographically photographing the logistical landscape, an experience I thoroughly recounted in Bureau Mission Two.

In this essay, Smithson uncovers how a site functions as both physical and discursive. He shows how to harness the physical, raw material of an overlooked site while facilitating its transformation into a distinct, discursive site. This meant elaborating out a dialectic of what Smithson termed as "site" and "non-site" to recognize the complexities of contemporary space that is simultaneously physical and abstract. He laid out these ideas in a short 1968 essay "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites," and further through a series of artworks titled *Site/Non-Site* [Fig.51].[502] As he described in 1970, "...my art exists in two realms—in my outdoor sites which can be visited only and which have no objects imposed on them, and indoors, where objects do exist..."[503] Sites and non-sites were never experienced together but complement each other across time and space. Adapted to my own needs, such an approach underscores the urgency to reckon with a site and its characteristics, while simultaneously ensuring a reflexive relationship maintains a conduit to recognizing the power dynamics and spatial politics of logistical space. The undercurrent that I must contend with is to find ways for landscape photography to stretch across genres and disciplines, such as cultural geography, art history, and architecture and urbanism, to develop a

499 Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 103.

500 Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 68-74.

501 Rory O'Dea, "Robert Smithson's Fictions: A Speculative Reading of 'The Monuments of Passaic,'" Holt/Smithson Foundation, July 2020, accessed February 14, 2024, https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/robert-smithsons-fictions-speculative-reading-monuments-passaic.

502 Robert Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 364.

503 Robert Smithson, in "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson," *Avalanche* (Fall 1970), quoted in Phyllis Tuchman, "Robert Smithson, 'A Nonsite (Franklin, New Jersey)' (1968)," Holt/Smithson Foundation, May 2020, accessed February 21, 2024, https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/robert-smithson-nonsite-franklin-new-jersey-1968.

[Fig.51]

series of views (and experiences) that intervene into the hegemonic grip of the logistical landscape. In my view, Smithson's insight entrenches land and its experiences as integral to the extra-photographic, offering an alternative to the rational, engineered, and official landscapes of logistics. Operating within, upon, and through the land is crucial to extra-photographic practice.

4.4 LOOKING IN, LOOKING OUT

Landscape essayist J.B. Jackson expressed concern over how landscape was treated in what he called a "degenerate" way — dwelling in its traditional past in order to prove the present as worthless and ripe for destruction. His worry was that recycling old methods and relying on past tropes could never create for the public a fruitful or engaged relationship to the contemporary built environment.[504] Jackson's insight acts as a catalyst for me to reflect on this era's contemporary spatial moment so as to not just reinterpret logistical landscapes but photographic production as well. This approach challenges consistent representations of logistical space as smooth and tidy and encourages the practitioner, as Trevor Paglen argues, "to seize the opportunities that present themselves in the spatial practices of culture. To move beyond critical reflection, critique alone, and political 'attitudes,' into the realm of practice. To experiment with creating new spaces, new ways of being."[505] What is needed is to lay a bridge between the physical world and art in order to foment active engagement to make legible the space of logistics — and the space of cultural production.[506] As I see it, the extra-photographic is permission to rely less upon the end result and more upon the practice itself as an experience for citizens to partake in their own production of space.

The extra-photographic blurs the boundaries between disciplines and categories, a process vital to critical land-based practices. American art critic Kirsten Swenson observes that amidst this blurring, new forms of engagement emerge, creating productive opportunities within the accrued sediment of overlapping domains.[507] This intentional confusion serves to introduce additional perspectives and situates the practitioner in a peripheral condition that enhances, rather than occludes, potential insight. For example, in her dissertation on American land art in the 1960s, American art historian Emily Eliza Scott introduces the American art historian Julian Myers-Szupinska's disruption of traditional disciplinary boundaries as a "para-art historical" practice.[508] Myers-Szupinska argues that this approach fogs the terrain between art and history, not to negate accepted art historical methods but to repurpose them. This technique extends beyond the artwork to consider broader contexts of art's creation, including socio-political, geographic, and contemporary issues. Para-art history is concerned with what Myers-Szupinska calls the "problem of history itself," exploring the intersections and discontinuities between art and other disciplines to provide an enriching and complex portrait.[509] In my work, this means disputing the boundaries of landscape photography by adopting a peripheral stance that spotlights overlooked sites and the complexities and contradictions involved in the practice itself. I presented part of this argument in

504 J.B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins, and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

505 Trevor Paglen, "Experimental Geography: From Cultural Production to the Production of Space," in *Experimental Geography*, 32.

506 T.J. Demos, "Another World, and Another…: Notes on Uneven Geographies," in *Uneven Geographies: Art and Globalisation* (Nottingham: Nottingham Contemporary, 2010), 11-19.

507 Scott, "Field Effects," 45.

508 Emily Eliza Scott, "Wasteland: American Landscapes in/and 1960s Art" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2010), 232.

509 Scott, "Wasteland," 232-233.

Chapter 3 in the presentation of alternative landscape photography practices. The aim is to introduce landscape photography to ancillary disciplines to disclose further possibilities for photographic production.

My practice is a dual exploration: reassessing my boundaries (and my practice's mode of production) and investigating the logistical landscape. By adopting the extra-photographic, I aim to reflect inwardly and outwardly, with this reflection paired with the goals of transforming both the internal dynamics of photographic practice and the external comprehension of the logistical landscape. Taking this position enables me to move within different discourses and practices to reappraise the power structures influencing the forces of photographic convention and the logistical landscape. Comfortably established as peripheral, I transcend inherited legacies of photographic production by prioritizing an experience-based approach containing a dash of pedagogical or didactical remit. The extra-photographic is more ideational and processual than expressive, highlighting the expansiveness of logistical land use and engaging with citizenry often marginalized from these sites, all the while evaluating my artistic methods. This dynamic interchange ensures that both the site and my practice evolve through mutual interaction.

4.5 ATTENDING TO PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE

Writing in his 1934 essay "The Author as Producer," the German cultural theorist Walter Benjamin articulated that cultural production is implicated in politics, arguing that an artist is not just a detached observer of society but a "producer" who actively participates in shaping cultural narratives. Benjamin's rejection of cultural work as an isolated activity, urging artists to insert their work into "living social contexts," resonates profoundly with the extra-photographic, which seeks to intervene into dominant ideological structures through active spatial engagement.[510] Applying the need to consciously navigate the logistical landscape, both as an artistic genre and a physical site, I have to resolve to not simply reproduce such space but to also function as an active intervention to create "extra" opportunities for these places to be perceived in additional ways. The space where an artist operates is crucial, as it inherently sculpts artistic output and its subsequent spatial production.[511] This is manifested in the logistical landscape, configured by a set of social relations that reinforce its official and exclusionary status. With acute sensitivity and reflexivity, I, as a photographer, can influence the production of space by intervening into established power relations, providing opportunities for alternative viewpoints and interpretations. The extra-photographic acts as a refusal against dominant structures by positioning photographic production beyond expectations and allowing other, unforeseen, forces in. This divergence accommodates and produces different configurations of artistic and logistical space, not only facilitating legibility of the site's conditions but also raising questions about where I operate and how those sites may impact my artistic production. It is a double act where the extra-photographic resists the influences of the genre while reshaping the spatial production of its subject.

510 Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer: Address at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris, April 27, 1934," in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 769.

511 Paglen, "Experimental Geography," 29-30.

If I do not critically examine my photographic mode of production, there is a risk that my actions fall prey to and perpetuate existing power structures. For example, landscape photography, when conducted within spatial systems of state power like the official landscape of the Port of Rotterdam, may unwittingly reproduce these systems. Recalling some of my earliest photographs produced as part of this research, they inadvertently succumbed to abstract economic forces by focusing primarily on commodity movement rather than the systems and infrastructures of those movements. As Paglen suggests, "if one takes the production of space seriously, the concept applies not only to 'objects' of study or criticism, but to the way one's own actions participate in the production of space."[512] His point is that the space where cultural production occurs must also be a concern for any photographer. This requires that I scrutinize both the logistical and cultural modes of production to understand how such land uses contain us and that I learn how to interpret these contexts effectively.

Paglen addresses photography's fundamental questions of its production and how it may better reflect the contemporary condition. He turns away from asking "what is art," and from the judgements cast in terms of its success, and turns instead to asking "how" photography relates to the world economically, socially, and culturally.[513] How is a relational question, inciting discursive junctures to overlap and not just produce an object for appreciation but to also act as part of a production process. Paglen says that "cultural production (like all production) is a spatial practice," implying that to engage actively in the relations of power not only exposes those relations but also creates new spaces to imagine alternatives.[514] The tension is between the demands of an artistic work and the context of its site, highlighting the intersection of artistic practice with spatial implications.

American art historian Rosalyn Deutsche, in her 1998 book *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics,* argues that the material conditions of production, including economic and political structures, govern the use of space and subsequently sculpt the content and meaning of artistic production. With that sentiment, Deutsche argues that art is more than just a study of objects — an artist must grasp how their actions can contribute to productions of space, for better or worse.[515] Deutsche positions artists as more than producers of art objects; they are agents of space, entangled in all kinds of spatial production. She notably uses the example of artists as vectors for gentrification: "When galleries and artists, assuming the role of the proverbial 'shock troops' of gentrification, moved into inexpensive storefronts and apartments, they aided the mechanisms [of gentrification] by driving up rents and displacing residents."[516] This reciprocal relationship between what an artist produces and how they configure the spatial culture of the environment is central to cultural production within the framework of the extra-photographic, meaning any art practice is simultaneously art historical and geographic. The geographic emphasizes the social, historical, and spatial dimensions of how work is created, recognizing how such artworks, like those within a logistical landscape, may contribute to spatial narratives beyond official accounts. Deutsche suggests that as a photographer, for example, one is not solely creating pictures but also producing within a specific spatial context and milieu that shapes, and is shaped by, the environment.

512 Paglen, "Experimental Geography," 31.

513 Paglen, "Experimental Geography," 35.

514 For Paglen's quote, see: Paglen, "Experimental Geography," 35. On imagining new spaces, see: John P. Jacob, "Trevor Paglen: Invisible Images and Impossible Objects," in *Trevor Paglen: Sites Unseen*, eds. John P. Jacob and Luke Skrebowski, with contributions by Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Kate Crawford (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum; London: GILES, 2018), 27-28.

515 Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

516 Deutsche, *Evictions*, 151, quoted in *Experimental Geography*.

4.6 THE GEOGRAPHIES OF PHOTOGRAPHY

The "extra" prefix I have appended to "photographic" extends photographic representation to include collaboration in the production of space and to consider the diverse, unpredictable actions of others as vital to comprehending space as both a specific place and a mode of cultural knowledge. It is not a matter of abandoning art and art history but is rather about seeing them become entangled with the geographical urge of spatial production. Extra-photographic, first planted on the ground as a way of acknowledging the complexities of the logistical landscape, underscores process over representation, "as a space where one bumps up against brute realities, or 'ground truths,' but also the limits of her own ability to fully apprehend them."[517]

As Trevor Paglen points out, the 21st century has seen a sizeable expansion of photographic machines and imaging systems — what he frames as "seeing machines" like digital cameras, police surveillance equipment, and unmanned drones — that create new visual "geographies."[518] The extra-photographic is embedded in such a notion and thus complicates the production of photography by shifting focus from representation to the performative conditions of photography's production and meaning. Paglen's mapping of photographic geographies is pivotal to the foundation of an extra-photographic method, linking spatially distributed networks of imaging technologies, systems, and processes to contemporary logistics that rely on these "seeing machines" for the movement and management of goods.[519] The extra-photographic is intimately tied to the relational and geographic, complicating the production of photography by undermining the convention of the single photograph to emphasize photography's production and meaning.

While Paglen's "geographies of photography" place a premium on the proliferation of imaging systems under the rubric of "seeing machines," my approach seeks to reconfigure these geographies further to include a range of tools, techniques, and circulatory methods that creep closer to what Paglen defines as "post-representation," a form of photography where the materiality of a work and its relations are intrinsic to each other.[520] He states that "I want [a] photography that doesn't just point to something; it actually is that something."[521] In this reading, geography enables photography to transcend its reliance on representation, foregrounding the process of its making as integral to its interpretation. Thus, a photograph becomes a confluence of histories, the material properties that birthed it, and is situated in the politics of its own production and viewing, inviting viewers to participate with the photograph and its site of production.[522]

The extra-photographic positions my practice with the geographic, where representation serves as just one discrete component in a larger nexus of operations. By employing a site tour and interpretive overlooks, I alter photography into a geographic assemblage that promotes experience and interconnection over just representation. This not only links a public who would

517 Scott, "Wasteland," 230.

518 Julian Stallabrass, "Negative Dialectics in the Google Era: A Conversation with Trevor Paglen," *October* 138 (Fall 2011): 4.

519 Trevor Paglen, "Seeing Machines," *Fotomuseum Winterthur*, March 13, 2014, accessed February 18, 2024, https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/2014/03/13/seeing-machines/.

520 On the geographies of photography, see: Trevor Paglen, "Geographies of Photography," *Fotomuseum Winterthur*, April 11, 2014, accessed February 18, 2024, https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/2014/04/11/geographies-of-photography/. On "post-representation," see: Stallabrass, "Negative Dialectics," 4.

521 Stallabrass, "Negative Dialectics," 4.

522 Paglen, "Seeing Machines."

otherwise be left isolated, relegated to the official version as distributed by the Port Authority's *FutureLand* interpretation centre and confronted with a narrative of exceptionalism, but it also triggers this public to consider new perspectives into the otherworldly conditions of a logistical landscape. The extra-photographic method fundamentally redefines my practice, focusing on reflexive artistic production, and it acts as a mechanism to create pathways for the public to freely interact with the logistical landscape. This method interrupts the assumption of these sites as fixed and inevitable, inviting active participation in the production of space, attesting to the spatial as an ongoing process of legibility. This engagement reveals material and cultural production as something other than abstract and unknowable; it instead presents it as a tangible force that shapes our physical surroundings. Thus, the extra-photographic extends beyond a methodological framework; it actively partakes in dissecting how material and cultural relations sculpt our environment and perceptions. When incorporated into photographic practice, not only are these relations unveiled, but they also set the stage for new and previously unimagined interpretations of the landscape, prompting a re-evaluation of the process of photography itself.

Walter Benjamin and Trevor Paglen each aspire to dismantle their inherited conventions of artistic production, with Benjamin advocating for radical changes to intervene into entrenched artistic structures, and Paglen emphasizing the geographical condition of art practice as something more-than-representational. This latter concept aligns closely with the extra-photographic, reflecting what British art historian and photography curator Julian Stallabrass would label as "performative acts."[523] In this configuration, the photograph is not just a static entity but an oppositional action that interrogates the constraints of the visible because the making of the image is enacted. Paglen, describing this shift, states that "the act of taking a photograph is just as important, if not more, than the photograph itself."[524] This proactive stance is supported by American visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff's idea of "the right to look," where the observer confronts power relations simply by the act of looking back, thereby not just reflecting but interrogating and confronting the presented reality — effecting a performative act.[525] In the context of an "out-of-focus" logistical landscape, these photographic "acts" transcend the echo of an official narrative, presenting the Port as negotiable, inviting the public to navigate more freely as they move through the human-altered landscape. The extra-photographic, therefore, is a marked shift that emphasizes a greater appreciation for process as an act of doing — a practice — over any finality. As a practice, it summons alternative visions that do not deny, but do complicate, the official landscape.

523 Stallabrass, "Negative Dialectics," 13.

524 Jacob, "Trevor Paglen," 32.

525 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011)

4.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I introduced the concept of the "extra-photographic," a method that reframes landscape photography as an active, continually evolving, and operative medium that destabilizes the status quo of landscape representation and advocates for a spatial understanding of the

various relations that structure the logistical landscape. This method integrates the photographic with the geographic, collapsing the bridge between photographic creation and spatial dynamics to cultivate the various actions of the Port by transforming an obscured and reluctant site into a legible landscape.

The extra-photographic invites a reflexive examination of one's role and impact within such sites. As a landscape photographer, I have used this chapter as an urgent reminder that depiction is a partner to active participation in efforts of, and for, legibility. By advocating for a dual role where photography is both a participatory and engaged medium, the extra-photographic aligns with broader social and political discourses, opening the door to an interdisciplinary practice that fuses the photographic with the geographic. In this chapter, I argued for photography to rescind its passive observer role and instead function operationally as an intervention into the official narrative as a method to challenge and reshape perceptions and the social and economic relations involved that enforce the landscape as official.

Building on the principles established here, Chapter 5 introduces the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes*, an institutional-like body that serves as a direct application of the theories thus far explored, creating a framework that systematically reconfigures and intervenes in the logistical landscape. Known colloquially as the *Bureau*, it is a body that documents and participates in the landscape through a series of interpretive interventions. As quasi-institutional, the *Bureau* is grounded in the interdisciplinary insights gleaned from the extra-photographic method, expanding the performative aspects of photography into spatial and interpretive actions. These interventions demonstrate the *Bureau's* role in reshaping perception and initiating dialogue on the unseen and underrepresented elements of the Port of Rotterdam, marking a significant transition from theoretical exploration to practical application. Examples of these interventions include a series of what I term overlooks, a site-based tour, and this publication. These interventions are further detailed in Bureau Mission Three. As a sustainable and future practice, the *Bureau* exemplifies a shift in how logistical landscapes, despite their authoritative and controlled appearances, can be reimagined as spaces filled with contradiction and wonder, and as sites for potential transformation.

CH 05

THE BUREAU OF OPERA-TIONAL LAND-SCAPES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, I introduced the extra-photographic concept, marking a significant shift in how landscape photography may be practiced, moving from its representational capacity to centring its performative potential. This shift reframed my role as a photographer from passive observer to active participant, merging the photographic with the geographic. I posited that the extra-photographic method endows landscape photography with novel tools and perspectives, altering how and the ways in which my practice intervenes into the established and official narrative of the Port of Rotterdam. I now turn to the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes*, a quasi-institutional body that directly applies the research gathered thus far. The *Bureau* is a coagulation of sensory, cognitive, and cultural frameworks that demands attention on the often overlooked and marginalized landscape of logistics, promoting acts of — and for — legibility. It is simultaneously an infrastructure and platform, soliciting diverse viewpoints and marginalized perspectives that promote acts of disclosure and scrutiny that do not just point to, but also animate, the latent meanings embedded within these landscapes.

This chapter unfolds practically and theoretically. To start, I explain how the *Bureau* operates as an amalgam of art, perception, and social structures within the Port of Rotterdam to contest and alter authoritative norms, both photographic and spatial. I advocate for public experience and interaction, essential to the development of other narratives that may crack into, and split open, official accounts. While the *Bureau* is formed as an institution, I demonstrate throughout this chapter that by adopting the trappings of bureaucracy, institutional mimicry facilitates an examination that subverts the established power structures and hierarchies of the practice of landscape photography, and of the site of its operation.

The latter part of this chapter presents the significant influence of French philosopher Jacques Rancière as central to the *Bureau's* strategy. Prioritizing Rancière's concept of aesthetics — making sense of the sensible as a way to break down real social and political hierarchies — is a way to value encounter and sensorial engagement of the landscape, enlivening the Port's static and fixed condition and reforming landscape photography beyond its compulsion for ordering and control. In this context, aesthtics is used throughout this chapter. Rancière's concepts of the "distribution of the sensible" and "dissensus" underpin the *Bureau's* quest to intervene into the dominant relations by enabling marginalized voices to contribute and reconfigure the dominant political and aesthetic order, by proposing alternative ways of seeing, thinking, and engaging with the world. While Rancière remains my primary focus, it is worth noting the British philosopher Terry Eagleton's concept of the aesthetic, particularly as it is shaped by 18th century German idealist thought, which complements this view. "Aesthetics," Eagleton asserts, "is born as a discourse of the body." [526] For Eagleton, the aesthetic involves how affective histories of human belonging might exist outside the life processes of capital. [527] Such peripheral spaces, in my view,

526 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 13.

527 Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic.*

critique and reject alienated forms of existence typical of modern bourgeois society — or, in my work, the "official" landscape. This framework echoes Rancière's insights by further opening spaces for alternative relationships to place and belonging, which I address in the following chapter.

These practical and theoretical excursions enforce the strategic alignment of the *Bureau*, enacting legibility for a public customarily excluded from closed landscapes like the Port of Rotterdam. Chapter 5 is the crux and climax of this research, formulating an alternate conception of *how* landscape photography can be reimagined and practiced within such sites of authority and control. In the end, I reveal the internecine relations between space, power, and visual representation and the potential to intervene and reshape the sensory order of the logistical landscape.

5.2 FRAMING THE BUREAU OF OPERATIONAL LANDSCAPES

We know that we should pay attention to the places of our surroundings, but often we do not. This is especially true in logistical zones, sites, which by their very design, operate beyond sight, settled into the liminal zones of the urban, ex-urban, and hinterland. These kinds of spaces are overlooked and ill-considered, at times covered up and scuttled out of mind as their utilitarian needs are seen as boring and even potentially dangerous. This is the logistical landscape — avoiding scrutiny while lurking in the shadows and peripheries of our attention and habits.[528] Yet while uncertain and inconvenient, considered ugly and held in a kind of contempt, logistical sites permeate the everyday condition of our lives, leeching into consciousness and shaping the landscape of which we are a part. Given this, what would happen if, instead of relegating logistics to a sideshow, something not worthy of our gaze, these spaces were viewed as opportunities to inquire into the complexities that shape our enviornment today? Dragging these logistical enterprises out from the corners of vision can help us comprehend how such spaces operate as an active agent in the sculpting of the world.

This is the mission and context of the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes*: to alight interest in a form of land use that is stubbornly peripheral, yet that is so prevalent that it is habitual, a part of our everyday experience. As American art historian Rachel Ziady DeLue reminds us, landscape is "the thing with which we exist."[529] Most people have encountered logistical landscapes in their daily pursuits yet still know very little about these places. They may be the spectacular, monumental deepwater port, or the oft-ignored anonymous warehouse squatting in an area of the city one hardly ever goes. Logistical landscapes, even the aforementioned spectacular ones, carry degrees of the unseen and invisible, the unknown and hidden. In this chapter, I introduce the *Bureau* as a way to entangle landscape photography practice (its sensory organs) with the cognitive and cultural frameworks that shape perception and valuation of land and its uses. The *Bureau* is a perceptual infrastructure that assists in interpreting and comprehending these complex environments, revealing the logistical landscape as a relational set of operations distributed across scales and geographies.[530]

528 Clare Lyster, *Learning from Logistics: How Networks Change Our Cities* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2016).

529 Rachael Ziady DeLue, "Elusive Landscapes and Shifting Grounds," in *Landscape Theory*, eds. Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 10, quoted in Emily Eliza Scott, "Field Effects: 'Invisible-5's' Illumination of Peripheral Geographies," *Art Journal* 69, no. 4 (2010): 46.

530 Lyster, *Learning from Logistics*.

The *Bureau* understands these distributed geographies and occupies a position that is peripheral in both physical location and approach. The periphery circumvents any comprehensive or unifying narrative that emanates out from an official landscape and allows other trajectories to form. Because the *Bureau* operates in logistical space, it is already marginal, existing on the circumference. Its operative state fully subscribes to Matthew Coolidge's (founder of the *Center for Land Use Interpretation)* belief that "there's a good view from the fence."[531] Working contentedly amidst the hidden and unfamiliar, the *Bureau* posits that while something may be dismissed, it can still be insightful. As such, the *Bureau's* role is to bring peripheral vision into focus. It does so by prying into the hidden and marginal states of logistical sites by attempting acts of interpretation and intervention into what is seen and unseen in order to show how these logistical landscapes are not just isolated locations but are naturalized into everyday, ordinary life. As I demonstrated in Bureau Mission One, the logistical landscape is a domestic (and ordinary) habitat, populated with a variety of "artifacts" that form the material processes of capital circulation.[532] While these artifacts, at first glance, are rarely of interest, with a little scrutiny they contain — and perhaps even reveal — collective insight about how such landscapes came to be and how logistics not only shapes the environs surrounding us but also forms the social conditions of what I previously called in Bureau Mission One *Homo Logisticus*.

The *Bureau* is a quasi-institution that operates within this domestic habitat. Its goal is to improve and clarify the collective understanding of logistical landscapes by specifically focusing on the "artifacts" of logistics, allowing them to be scrutinized and centred not as peripheral fuzz, but as central to making sense of our contemporary, spatial moment. As the *Center for Land Use Interpretation's (CLUI)* Matthew Coolidge says, "Artifacts are meaningless without interpretation. They are just shaped dirt, rock, plastic, metal, or whatever. With interpretation they become something."[533] Indeed, once placed under scrutiny, however inchoate, these banal artifacts become chances to reveal something not just about themselves, but about how we are now. Welded together through interpretation, these artifacts form a new kind of knowledge, their combined tensions raising other possible landscapes. Thus, there is a didactic and discursive urge to the *Bureau*. This work is conducted using various methods; for the sake of brevity, the *Bureau* restricts itself to three interpretive interventions: a set of signage that I frame as "overlooks," a site-based tour, and this publication. I will speak to these interpretive interventions in greater detail in Bureau Mission Three, including how these diffusion tactics converge to improve human comprehension of how logistics shapes Earth's physical form.

The *Bureau* encourages more than just passive looking at landscapes; instead, it emphasizes that being in, and a part of, logistical landscapes is crucial to how these sites may be interpreted and made legible.[534] Embodied experience and presence are amplified by the *Bureau's* tactical and interpretive gestures as a way for citizens to negotiate and clarify the complexities of logistical sites. Often, logistical landscapes are administered through various engineering, state, and security apparatuses, rendering these landscapes inevitable and naturalized, hardly ever contested.[535] This is what Bureau Mission Three attests to in written and photographic form.

531 Christy Lange, "Walking the Land," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 13 (Spring/Summer 2006): 16.

532 The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "It Takes One: Matthew Coolidge," July 17, 2019, accessed February 19, 2024, https://www.tclf.org/it-takes-one-matthew-coolidge.

533 Cultural Landscape Foundation, "It Takes One."

534 Emily Eliza Scott, "Undisciplined Geography: Notes from the Field of Contemporary Art," in *Geohumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place*, eds. Michael Dear, Jim Ketchum, Sarah Luria, and Douglas Richardson (London: Routledge, 2011), 50-60.

535 Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014). On the landscape as inevitable and naturalized, see: William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

By creating moments for active engagement, the *Bureau* shatters any notion of these peculiar sites remaining incontestable. Instead, the logistical landscape becomes ripe for exploration and not just considered a unit of information waiting to be gathered and measured. While a didactical strategy may insinuate strict ideological hierarchies, the *Bureau* is flexible, preferring an open-ended, undogmatic approach, even inviting contradiction. The British writer Nicola Twilley calls this a form of "perceptual revelation, in which a previously overlooked site is made not only visible, but also legible as a guide to understanding larger, nationwide systems."[536]

The name — *Bureau of Operational Landscapes* — tells a story. Part of this story is a subtle send-up of administrative ego, whose names try to enforce a totality of who they are and what they do, all within a few characters (and often accompanied by a logo, a symbol which this bureau also possesses) [Fig.52]. Usually, the implication is that they are the authority on the matter; negotiations against such power will be summarily dismissed. In the *Bureau's* case, its name is self-deprecating. Institutional mimicry is baked into its outlook as a way to engage critically with the hierarchical structures that underlie not just logistical processes but photographic practice as well. This administrative stance implies a neutral state but paradoxically serves as fertile ground for various meanings and interpretations to coalesce, signalling the *Bureau's* role in redefining conventional understandings of landscape and authority. Even though interpretation is a subjective process — there is no one way to interpret land use — the *Bureau* by default still provides a point of view. This critical engagement extends to its interpretive approach, emphasizing points of view often sidelined by official narratives. The *Bureau's* point of view is the overlooked and ill-considered, beyond the official and towards the marginal. As such, it is a kind of frame where various meanings and interpretations can be re-directed to help induce legibility, a forum for overlapping meanings to emerge within the logistical landscape.[537] Frame, in the context of photography, implies a formal convention that inscribes beauty within a boundary that contains something to be gazed upon, even admired. However, the *Bureau* employs the concept of frame not just as a photographic boundary but as a tool to bring clarity and additional perspectives to overlooked landscapes, gathering and then distributing a variety of subjective interpretations. There is a balance between content and context, a consideration of what is placed in the frame, and also how, and in what way, the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes* frames its point of view.[538]

5.3 THE BUREAU AND THE PORT OF ROTTERDAM

By now, I have presented Rotterdam's container port as simultaneously marginal and everywhere, exceptional and unknown. The *CLUI's* Matthew Coolidge, while on one of their famous bus tours conducted over the *Center's* nearly three-decade run, verifies this logistical factor when he said to passengers on a trip to the industrial city of Irwindale, California, that "We will be going to some of the most banal and dramatic landscapes in Los Angeles, and by the time we are done, we won't be able to tell the difference."[539] Places such as Irwindale — home to one of the largest aggregate mining

[Fig.52]

536 Nicola Twilley, "Finding Tarzan at the Sanitation Department," *Good*, April 12, 2011, accessed February 18, 2024, https://www.good.is/articles/finding-tarzan-at-the-sanitation-department.

537 Stephanie LeMenager, "A Poetics of Infrastructure: Interview with Matt Coolidge," *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 1, no. 1 (January 2014).

538 Cultural Landscape Foundation, "It Takes One."

539 "Margins in Our Midst: A Journey into Irwindale," *The Lay of the Land: The Center for Land Use Interpretation Newsletter*, no. 26 (Winter 2003).

sites in the United States — and the Port of Rotterdam are amalgams of the beautiful and terrible. Beautiful, because they can be testaments to human ingenuity that provide life's essentials, and terrible, because of the infrastructural violence necessary to sustain such sites. American curator and writer Michael Ned Holte describes this juxtaposition as "the administrative sublime": landscapes and infrastructures that reveal the dual nature of human intervention on the land — both monumental and mundane — while positioning the futile act of documentation and interpretation as a reflection on the magnitude of such human activity.[540] I extend Holte's notion of the administrative sublime to include the inaccessibility and obstructions posed by surveillance infrastructures, legal frameworks, and other transnational regulations that are integral to logistical landscapes, especially those like the Port of Rotterdam.

In logistical landscapes, accessibility is rendered mostly moot. Any encounter can almost be considered heroic. The *Bureau* roams amidst inaccessible, even hostile, logistical landscapes that are off limits, out of view, or just banal enough to attract no attention. Its purpose is found in this kind of terrain. The *Bureau* reconfigures ground surface as a kind of political terrain that slides across many possible positions, adapting the *CLUI's* position that "The environmentalist, the miner, the tourist, and the artist, for example, all have different ideas about the function and value of a particular landscape."[541] Citizens are invited to act as vectors, participating with the *Bureau* to propagate other understandings of the logistical landscape by revealing latent narratives and inviting a re-evaluation of the Port's singular image. As the *Bureau* operates amidst the overlooked, it never forgets that landscape is an active force, an entity comprising the material, social, experiential, and ideological. The *Bureau's* frame is an attempt to gather stories and experiences to illuminate the natural, social, and economic histories of logistical sites that often remain beyond access and hidden.[542]

Thus, the *Bureau* not only broadens the physical characteristics of a logistical site by entertaining other aspects of how those sites are perceived and interacted with, but it also enables experiences that transcend the visual. Just as the administrative sublime juxtaposes the monumental and mundane with the futility of documentation, whenever I visit the Port of Rotterdam, I am constantly oscillating between different perceptions of space. I never know if I should express abject horror at the monstrosity of the massive, rusted container ships that embody the exploitation of labour relations or if I should express awe at the industriousness and engineering might of those very ships.[543] These are two ends of a political spectrum. As Matthew Coolidge previously pointed out, something can be simultaneously beautiful and horrible. The *Bureau* doesn't just mirror the perceived interpretation of the site, but instead it engages with whomever is doing the looking and provides opportunities to contend with the site, for example through differences of opinion or expectation. By encouraging conflicting judgements, the *Bureau* recognizes that there is capacity to come away from that site with a more fulfilling and complex sensibility of place.

The landscape, as I argued throughout the first three chapters, cannot be framed as static. Following theorist of visual culture W.J.T. Mitchell's direction, the *Bureau* views the landscape as a verb — a practice — which dis-

540 Michael Ned Holte, "The Administrative Sublime or The Center for Land Use Interpretation at the Circumference," *Afterall* 13 (Spring/Summer 2006): 18-26.

541 The Center for Land Use Interpretation, *The Land Use Museum Brochure* (1997), quoted in Kate L. Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic: Anthropic Landscapes of the Center for Land Use Interpretation," *Afterimage* 25, no. 2 (September/October 1997): 5.

542 Scott, "Field Effects," 39.

543 Ralph Rugoff, "Circling the Center," in *Overlook: Exploring America's Internal Fringes with the Center for Land Use Interpretation*, eds. Matthew Coolidge and Sarah Simons (New York: Metropolis Books, 2006), 41.

rupts the vision of the logistical site as immobile and natural.[544] Landscape, according to British landscape theorist John Wylie, is "quintessentially visual."[545] However, when framed as a verb, it implies a more-than-visual commingling of looking and experience. As a verb, landscape foregrounds its experiential and material aspects and operates as a disruption to the static and fixed condition of logistics, remaining open to dynamic possibility (though many contradictions may emerge).

5.4 THE BUREAU AS A SPATIAL PRACTICE

The Port is a singular entity, naturalized in the landscape through a variety of discursive measures. One example is the Port Authority's *FutureLand*, its official interpretive centre plunked in the heart of operations, where it boldly claims: "YOU SIMPLY CAN'T GET CLOSER TO THE PORT."[546] Didactical displays proclaim the future is already written, creating a gateway for the average citizen to engage with the Port on its terms. *FutureLand* is one of the Port Authority's agents in the production of space, lubricating frictionless encounters to consume the official version by reinforcing their narrative as inevitable. However, the *Bureau* enters into this production of space through its interpretative interventions that counter, expand, combine, and even challenge *FutureLand's* official version. Through the adoption of the extra-photographic, my practice is conditioned as a process that shapes reality, and with it, space. This is inherently spatial because the production of photographs involves our own position as producers and as subjects and bodies that take up space with a camera as our extension. The extra-photographic possesses the force to disrupt, reinforce, or challenge social norms and expectations. For example, while *FutureLand* breathlessly exclaims "Experience what it's like when everything is big, bigger or biggest!," what about the small, mundane, or unnecessary?[547] Artist Trevor Paglen states that humans create the world and in turn are created by that world, "setting powerful constraints upon subsequent activity."[548] For example, I move through the Port in specific ways and visit locations frequently left outside *FutureLand's* remit. Simply by demonstrating my camera and moving beyond any pre-approved locations, my experiences are already entangled with a citizen's, contributing to a production of space other than the official. The *Bureau* interprets the (official) interpretation.

As a photographer facing the logistical landscape, I encounter a dichotomy where the Port's operations are simultaneously spectacular yet elusively hidden from scrutiny. The spectacle frequently overshadows the Port's hidden, yet crucial, functions. A spatial practice helps to understand this paradox in two ways. First, attention is paid to how such landscapes are produced by economic and social processes, and second, we look to how these sites may be transformed and contested through different acts of engagement and diffusion. The introduction of the extra-photographic to the *Bureau* centres the experiential qualities of photographic production over its representative aspects to register the logistical landscape as more than simply a dazzling sight. Such concern aligns with British literary critic John Barrell's premise that landscape has a "dark side," a duplicitous image ser-

544 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Introduction," in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

545 John Wylie, *Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2007), 91.

546 Port of Rotterdam, "FutureLand," accessed March 7, 2024, https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/to-do-port/future-land.

547 Port of Rotterdam, "FutureLand."

548 Trevor Paglen, "Experimental Geography: From Cultural Production to the Production of Space," in *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism*, (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House; New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), 32.

vile to capital accumulation, imperial power, and ideology that cloaks the agenda of power behind a veil that is both natural and that naturalizes the scene.[549] Barrell's thesis is of course present in the Port, where power and control render it fixed, an inevitable part of Rotterdam's past and future. In my view, by moving beyond representation the stability and naturalization of the landscape is questioned, shedding any possibility for the finality of the photograph to reassert this fixing. As a spatial practice, the *Bureau* reappraises landscape to be more than just a medium of observation, but instead to coerce the limits of perception into expanding the faculties for imagining.[550] Much of this can be accomplished by embracing uncertainty through the possibility of multiple narratives, rather than making a claim towards any singular narrative or entity.

5.5 THE BUREAU AS A BUREAU

The *Bureau* is somewhat akin to an interpretation centre (I extrapolate this similarity in greater detail in the ensuing Bureau Mission Three), utilizing gentle mockery of administrative norms to create a deadpan portrait of logistical land use to displace the official in favour of the marginal and peripheral. It appropriates the institutional character of administration to diffuse its findings with an audience that might not have much of a relationship to Rotterdam's port other than through an encounter with *FutureLand*. The *Bureau* invites divergent perspectives beyond this institutionalized one, functioning as a kind of public forum where competing visions meet, reflect, and perhaps contradict each other. However, the *Bureau*, while not a fully fictive construction, is a low-key enterprise. The *Bureau* can never attain true administrative power with the limited tools at its disposal, yet in spite of this, fresh distance can be maintained to open up space for expertise to occur outside the prescribed norms and procedures of a traditional bureau.[551] Additionally, its modest productions still manage to address the political and sensitive sites of logistics by quietly subverting the official-ness of these sites through the very construction of the *Bureau* itself. Or, for example, the design of the overlooks and this very dissertation, with its deadpan, earnest deployment of a matter-of-fact style (in language and design), is meant to allude to a factual, somewhat empirical-based account of the role of logistical landscapes as they permeate the everyday. Playful misuse of institutional norms and behaviours allows citizens to have experiences of logistical sites that are in proximity to their everyday life.

In this sense, the *Bureau* aligns itself with the art historian Miwon Kwon's idea of a provider of critical artistic services rather than the traditional producer of objects, where "the artist used to be a maker of aesthetic objects, [but] now he/she is a facilitator, educator, coordinator, and bureaucrat."[552] In this context, Kwon proposes to use the term "collective creative praxis," which emerges from site-specific art's prioritization of the physical and architectural aspects of a site over its social or cultural conditions.[553] At first glance, Kwon's "collective creative praxis" resembles aspects of dialogic art or relational aesthetics; however, the divergence is that dialogic art emphasizes just that: the conversational and dialogic in unison with various

549 John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

550 Henrik Gustafsson, "Foresight, Hindsight and State Secrecy in the American West: The Geopolitical Aesthetics of Trevor Paglen," *Journal of Visual Culture* 12, no. 1 (2013): 150.

551 Julian Kilker, "Overlook: Exploring the Internal Fringes of America with the Center of Land Use Interpretation," *Cultural Geographies* 15, no. 4 (2008): 290-292.

552 Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 50-51.

553 Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 154.

communities to develop an art that resides in the exchange of experiences and perspectives.[554] Relational aesthetics, a term coined by French curator Nicholas Bourriaud in the 1990s, is "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."[555] Each mode posits a new paradigm that values relational and social complexity over representation and materiality. What unites these social and dematerialized forms of art practice is the role of the citizen and public in the creation of art beyond the object, where acute attention is paid to the experience and the perceptual – collaboration, participation, and social interaction are all vital to its promise.

What dialogic art and relational aesthetics provide for the *Bureau* are ways to question the inheritances of disciplinary rules while finding routines to release the boundaries of the artist, audience, and artworks. However, where the *Bureau* diverges is that it does not create a provisional community, such as in dialogic art, nor does it acquiesce to completely bypassing artistic convention as relational aesthetics requires. Instead, the *Bureau* bears prudence and subscribes to Kwon's goal for an artistic practice that is projective over expressive.[556] According to Matthew Coolidge, there is a Duchampian logic in this scenario, pointing out "very early on in art that it wasn't the object that was the work of art, but it was the view of the object and the perspective of each individual who looked at it."[557] The *Bureau* faciliates temporary arrangements for the public to co-exist, precariously bound together to gaze upon an overlooked location of the Port, or to perch together on the upper deck of the *FutureLand* ferry as it cruises amongst the steel hulks of the container terminal.

5.6 POLITICS OF THE BUREAU (OR NOT)

The *Bureau* is not an advocacy agency for environmental or ecological concerns, nor does it sidle up to state and corporate sponsors. Its milieu is similar to what American art critic Ralph Rugoff applies to the *CLUI*, that of "examin[ing] areas where the man-made, the cultural, and the natural [seem] to merge."[558] There is a smidge of institutional aspiration, coated in irony (but not too much). Cast in an institutional mould, the *Bureau* creates critical space resistant to institutional or official knowledge, heightening understanding of the dynamics of power and administration that shape our everyday habitat, which is often left to various administrations and institutions to dispatch. The *Bureau,* then, has a non-apparent set of politics.[559]

The *Bureau's* appropriation of the systems (and appearances) of bureaucracy emphasizes the validity and necessity of logistical forces in the landscape. Central to this is understanding how logistics moulds the environment in its own image, and how citizens are captured within these systems. Acknowledging that authority as a construct is crucial, yet merely recognizing it isn't sufficient to challenge or thwart its legitimacy. Institutions, by design, take on an air of gravitas and inscrutability, remaining difficult to access and frequently left unchallenged. In my view, the *Bureau* can be con-

554 Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2004).

555 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Denyse Beaulieu (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2024), 113.

556 Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 154.

557 Matthew Coolidge, as quoted in Brendan Bernhard, "Play of the Land,"*LA Weekly* 19, no. 27 (1997): 26, cited in Kate L. Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic: Anthropic Landscapes of the Center for Land Use Interpretation," *Afterimage* 25, no. 2 (September/October 1997): 5.

558 Rugoff, "Circling the Center," 35.

559 Rugoff, "Circling the Center," 38.

sidered what American art critic Doug Harvey applied to the *CLUI* when he labelled them an "intelligent bureaucracy," which is not just about criticizing bureaucracies, but also about offering a greater sense of institutional reflexivity in order to reveal biases and concerns inherent to administrative nature.[560] The *Bureau* is not overtly in favour of any one position; though, this cannot be mistaken for neutrality, because the task of remaining neutral is still a political choice. Neutrality is platonic and only achievable in theory. In light of this, the *Bureau*'s remit is to create room for flexible interpretation on behalf of a visitor to logistical sites, where one can find their own view within the frame and not be forced into any official, or dogmatic, position. Yet neutrality is also an opening for uncertainty, which allows one to become attuned to and to search for bearings to reorient oneself within an uncertain site.[561]

While it simulates an agency or some kind of administrative office, the *Bureau* operates as unfixed, with no specific address or location. Because of this, there is an ambiguity, or perhaps even liminality, in its character. But what remains at the *Bureau's* core is intervention into an official narrative in order to reveal other human–land relationships within that singular discourse. Part of the *Bureau's* artistic production (expanded on in Bureau Mission Three) are various "overlooks" that operate in tandem to the official ones produced by Rotterdam's Port Authority. These overlooks transform space from an official, authorized one, into a secondary, or alternative, view. Exemplary of this tactic is the Métis-Canadian photographer Warren Cariou, whose photographic series *Petrography* transforms sites and produces new spatial configurations within official, highly toxic landscapes.[562] Cariou's "petrographs" are produced within the Canadian province of Alberta's northern Athabasca tar sands, a monumentally scaled site where heavy crude oil is extracted and refined [Fig.53].

Utilizing naturally occurring bitumen gathered from a location near the tar sands (bitumen being a material integral to the very landscape he is part of), Cariou creates "petrographs" of the altered boreal forest and its recently constructed network of oil infrastructures that not only literally register the landscape but also profoundly critique the environmental impact of oil extraction. His photographs, taking on a distinctly reflective golden hue, introduces an alternative narrative within the official discourse surrounding land use and industrial exploitation. Cariou's petrographs are liminal as they navigate the boundary between official narratives — those sanctioned by corporations and governments involved in tar sands exploitation — and the vernacular perspectives of ecological stewardship. His unique method creates space where the seen aspects of landscape, like the scars of visible extraction, intersect with the unseen, such as his own grappling with the effects of bitumen mining on Indigenous territories and the people disrupted by industrial activity.[563] Cariou's landscape petrography embodies disciplinary liminality, navigating an ambiguous state between art and activism.

560 Doug Harvey, quoted in Kilker, *Overlook*.

561 LuLing Osofsky, "Interview with Matthew Coolidge of the Center for Land Use Interpretation," *Creative Ecologies*, April 2017, accessed February 19, 2024, https://creativeecologies.ucsc.edu/extraction-clui-interview/.

562 Warren Cariou, "Portfolio: Petrographs," *Photography and Culture* 13, no. 2 (2020): 253-256. Note that Métis people are descendants of European and Indigenous heritage, mostly found within Canada's prairie provinces. It is a complex and contentious term, and I cannot do it justice in a footnote. However, it is crucial to provide context to Cariou's practice through his Indigenous heritage.

563 Cariou, "Petrographs," 253.

[Fig.53]

5.7 THE DEMATERIALIZATION OF PHOTOGRAPHIC MATTER

Disciplinary ambiguity has always been present in my own work. *War Sand*, a publication looking at a single day in history, June 6, 1944, is at once historical, scientific, fictional, and an ode to popular culture, intentionally clouding disciplinary posture [Fig.54].[564] Its status is up for negotiation, refusing to be neatly categorized. The *Bureau* inherits what *War Sand* began, compiling "sedimentary" layers that are simultaneously artistic, administrative, sociological, geographical, and architectural. However, while *War Sand* was a collaborative project involving three authors, the *Bureau* surpasses this model of authorial collaboration and instead finds ways to bury the author out of sight, even rendered anonymous. This is similar to how the artist Robert Smithson was provoked to dissolve the artist's ego in favour of group identification, expressing his desire to "return to the origins of material, sort of a dematerialization of refined matter."[565] In a corresponding vein, the *Bureau* constructs a parallel maneuver: the dematerialization of photographic matter, specifically the landscape genre, in favour of disciplinary ambiguity and authorial anonymity.

The dematerialization of photographic matter is an attempt to intervene into the traditions and conventions of landscape as a genre and introduce other ways, and sensibilities, to account for logistical transformations of the everyday. Dematerialization happens in two ways. First, photography is employed on an operative rather than expressive level. In Chapter 4, I defined operative — or operational — photography as an active agent that transforms reality rather than just representing it, and that also emphasizes photography as a process and intervention within the landscape. I prefer for the photograph to function as fodder for the circulation of ideas, operating across different milieus, such as publication, tourism, and intervention. Second, photography functions as an artistic endeavour, but only in the documentary ability to exist in a social context where its meaning is able to float free and find other associations beyond its origin. Dematerialization prioritizes the uncertainty of an image as a way to allow others to draw conclusions — and contradictions — based on the reception, and experience, of the work. This makes the *Bureau* marginal and peripheral because it moves beyond the privileged spaces of the museum, gallery, or other locales where photography is primarily shown (and sold). Instead, the site itself is the venue, collapsing Smithson's site and non-site into one, which delineates the interaction between physical locations and their conceptual representations.[566]

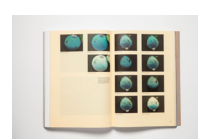
564 Donald Weber, *War Sand* (Amsterdam: Polygon, 2017).

565 Robert Smithson, "Fragments of an Interview with P.A. [Patsy] Norvell," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 192–195, quoted in Emily Eliza Scott, "Wasteland: American Landscapes in/and 1960s Art" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2010), 192.

566 Robert Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 364.

5.8 AESTHETICS AS INTERVENTION

The *Bureau*, adopting a marginal stance, lets loose new aesthetic experiences — and possibility. French philosopher Jacques Rancière describes aesthetics as "the distribution of the sensible," which he says are the ways we perceive and make sense of the world and how the visible, sayable,



[Fig.54]

and thinkable realms that inhabit our everyday lives can be contested.[567] He states that traditional art is associated with a hierarchy that divides this sensible realm — the visible, sayable, thinkable — from that which can be understood or comprehended. Hierarchies privilege certain artistic forms of production and exclude others. For example, the representational regime of art was guided by a particular set of rules, which privileges certain genres or subjects over others, strictly limiting disciplinary curiosity to its own boundaries, and designating distinctions between active artist and passive viewer.[568] The *Bureau* falls outside this regime and instead dwells on the margins of photographic practice by actively promoting the dematerialization of photographic matter. However, it is more than just artistic forms of production where the distribution of the sensible occurs. Logistical landscapes are also exclusionary, official zones which establish a dominant narrative of how things move through space. In light of this, the *Bureau* reimagines other perceptions and experiences of and for these sites.

Rancière's "distribution of the sensible" sees art operating in a different way, having the potential to disrupt and challenge dominant power relations by creating new forms of visibility and ways of thinking about the world. By displacing the representational regime for an aesthetic one, art is suddenly unbound by traditional hierarchies and conventions, and better able to reflect everyday realities in ways that challenge conventional — official — perceptions. The *Bureau* is a distributor of the sensible through artistic intervention to undermine the logistical impulse to stay hidden. Simultaneously, these actions contribute to the dissolution of the "representational regime" in the landscape genre of photography to seek out ways of relating to landscape via topographical means. Taken together, a different perception of logistical space is not just visible, but sayable and thinkable, too.

By taking seriously Rancière's proposition, the *Bureau* subsists in the margins of traditional practice and slips out from any hierarchies that determine and enforce what kinds of production may, or may not, originate. The "distribution of the sensible" suggests that the relationship between the sensible and intelligible is not fixed, and that in this instability lies the potential to intervene not just into hierarchies of artistic production but also into the hegemonic power relations that structure logistical sites like the Port of Rotterdam. Aesthetics is more than appearances — it is also a political experience that opens up for a citizen how to perceive and understand the logistical environment, while allowing for difference and possibility to arise out of a singular, static entity. Photography, dematerialized as marginal, can potentially create new forms of subjectivity and agency by reaching into the territory of the invisible to make visible the systematizing and ruthless efficiency of logistics.

In conventional artistic practice, Rancière notes that the artist is usually the creator, the one who produces art, while the viewer is a passive receptacle who consumes or interprets the art. In this gulf of creator and spectator, there is a clear distinction of hierarchies, where the artist's "verve" or creative power overshadows the spectator's reception of that art. The photographer and writer Allan Sekula, writing in his essay "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," clearly articulates this divide in relation to photographic practice, stating that:

567 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

568 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 21.

> ...recent efforts to elevate photography unequivocally to the status of high art by transforming the photographic print as a privileged commodity, and the photographer, regardless of working context, into an autonomous *auteur* with a capacity for genius, have the effect of restoring the 'aura' [...] to a mass-communication medium.[569]

There's a lot to unpack in this statement, but Sekula viscerally addresses how the photographer, when elevated to the status of *auteur*, reinforces the traditional hierarchy within art, separating its production from its consumption. Invoking Walter Benjamin's "aura" — an artwork's unique presence, authenticity, and authority — the photograph becomes an object of reverence rather than a site for engagement and interpretation.[570] Aesthetics, in this instance, is deployed in this scenario as a form of detachment, severing the photograph from its mass-communication origin and multiple contexts, and instead elevates the artist, as Sekula states, into a singular "genius," celebrating individualism over collectivism. While Rancière does not explicitly address the commodification of art as a part of the fundamental divide between artist and viewer, Sekula sees photography's capitulation to high art as integral to enforcing and sustaining such divisions. He points out that elevating the photographic print into an object of admiration and institutionalizing it through its inclusion into art world infrastructures only reinforces elite separation of what was, ostensibly, a medium of mass communication meant to drift in endless contexts. The restoration of "aura" through commodification reinforces hierarchical divisions, obstructing the medium's inherent potential for democratic engagement and participation. This is where Rancière's consideration of the aesthetic aligns with Sekula's argument, each seeking to intervene into the artist–viewer divide, and redistribute how, and to whom, artworks may be considered.

The sensible, in relation to a logistical landscape like Rotterdam, is the way systems and land use organizes and structures our perception of time and space. This is exactly what I referred to as "bureaucratic vision" in Bureau Mission One. A brief recap: logistics shapes vision into what can and cannot be seen using various technologies and infrastructures that standardize time and space. For example, the shipping container, local and global procedures of arcane regulatory frameworks, webs of security and surveillance, or even the division of labour across different nodes of the logistical network all conspire to enforce and govern the limits of vision suspended in a non-negotiable, official view. Rancière's "sensible," filtered through bureaucratic vision, becomes a singular sensory experience. It determines what can be seen, heard, and conceived of as valuable or meaningful while also deciding what should be considered and what should be left aside and cast as "exclusions." Even something as innocuous as *FutureLand* is an example of how the "sensible," when cast as official, creates an exclusionary act limiting the very sensory experience of its environs by restricting a visitor's chances for other kinds of perception, participation, and expression.

The *Bureau*, even in its mission to dematerialize photographic matter, is still an art practice. It occupies a liminal position, confronting the bound-

569 Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983* (London: MACK, 2016), 54. Emphasis in the original.

570 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin, 2008).

aries of contemporary landscape photography by prowling the periphery for an aesthetic that values experience and encounter over appearances and emotional impact, thus enlivening the sensorial. The *Bureau's* artistic identity, however, will never be totally dematerialized because it is art that enables the cultural inscription of logistics to be read and disseminated. The *Bureau's* application of the extra-photographic reminds us that while landscape is a human-induced endeavour, art is also a viable and meaningful way to cross boundaries, transcend disciplines, and produce intersections of connections, formulating new categories and even housing conflicts. However, in light of logistical processes seeping into domestic habitat and its attendant artistic practices, the established conventions of landscape photography are no longer sufficient.

5.9 DISPLACING THE REPRESENTATIONAL REGIME

As a former photojournalist, my "default" state of photography has always been its inclusion as a medium of mass communication. At its best, we can take this to mean that photography is a genuine way to engage actively with social issues, where its pedagogical remit functions as a social mobilizer towards some kind of structural or systematic change — an active participant in the construction of reality.[571] Earlier, I framed such a distinction as an operative practice, which addresses the transformative potential of photography that advocates for art as an active agent in particular social milieus. Part of this "operation" is the aforementioned "dematerialization of photographic matter" — namely, the dissolution of the author. I see this as one way to address Rancière's call to distribute the sensible on a more democratic basis, making visual representation accessible. To do so, Sekula warns that "artists and writers [...] need to *educate themselves out of their own professional elitism and narrowness of concern*."[572] Such dissolution shifts the focus from the creator — Sekula's "auteur" — to the created work, collapsing any distinction of its value as an artwork, and instead amplifying its communicative potential. By undermining a significant pillar of artistic practice — the subjectivity of the creator, whose approach is applauded over any potential for social engagement or commentary — the traditional binary of creator/viewer dissolves, its barriers redistributed in favour of communal and egalitarian engagement with artistic practice. Meaning is generated out of a melange of interpretations and interactions, not top-down from the artist.

In Chapter 4, I noted Miwon Kwon's assertion that artists are becoming "providers" rather than "producers." Attaching such ideas to Rancière's framework, we can see another way where the distribution of the sensible occurs. The dematerialization of photographic matter is not just attached to the dissolution of the artist, but it also reconditions artistic practice as a dynamic interface, echoing the British and Japanese artists Tim Collins and Reiko Goto. Collins and Goto use the term "interface" as a kind of ecological methodology — hinting at the metabolic condition of interconnected systems and structures that also incorporates communal relations between individual and natural environments.[573] They destabilize the passive distribution of traditional roles — creator/viewer — and also tie it back into

571 Devin Fore, "Introduction," October 118 (Fall 2006): 3.

572 Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism," 54. Emphasis in the original.

573 Tim Collins and Reiko Goto Collins, "Art and Living Things: The Ethical, Aesthetic Impulse," in *Human-Environment Relations: Transformative Values in Theory and Practice*, eds. Emily Brady and Pauline Phemister (Dordrecht; Heidelberg; London; New York: Springer, 2012), 112.

the landscape idea. In this sense, artistic intervention is also a medium, an extension of disciplinary boundaries that invites viewers to renegotiate their relationship to landscape, and, by extension, to the social and political fabric of the environment. As a "provider," the work itself is a platform encouraging viewers to exercise their own interpretive agency, destabilizing the passivity of consumption. The *Bureau* utilizes this strategy of "provider" with its series of "overlooks," interpretive panels installed within the Port of Rotterdam, parallel to, and distinct from, the Port Authority's own (limited) signage. They mimic classic signage found in national parks and other popular tourist sites. While in Bureau Mission Three I go into detail regarding these interpretive gestures, I use this as an example here of how I am trying to participate in the distribution of the sensible. These "overlooks" are not end-points but starting points for engagement. I see them as interventions within the logistical landscape, prompts to be used by viewers to reinterpret their surroundings and to not to just accept the official view as the only view. These "overlooks" redistribute the sensible by opening up space for new, alternative visions of sensory experience; they also respect the "operative" condition of the *Bureau* that democratizes artistic process as attainable.

Rancière assesses how the representational regime of art often serves to maintain social hierarchies by what is visible, sayable, and thinkable within any given community, creating exclusive clubs of who participates in artistic discourse. The *Bureau* is not interested in maintaining aura and is fully fine with accepting photography as a mass medium produced anonymously. As such, the representational regime of art is subverted, and how an artwork can be viewed, understood, and valued is summarily redistributed. Demoting the status of the author also removes the aura of the photograph as an object, countering the exclusivity of art and its forms of appreciation, and inviting a multiplicity of (contradictory [which is okay]) meanings, harkening back to the "operative" stance of the *Bureau* that encourages a collective shaping of our shared sensory experience and cultural narrative.

One artist's work is exemplary of displacing the representational regime in favour of an aesthetic one. Vincent Enrique Hernandez is a young Los Angeles-based artist whose primary medium is his 1987 Volvo and the suburbs of Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley [Fig.55].[574] Hernandez leads immersive, five-hour long tours with a couple of people stuffed in the back of his old car — what he calls an interactive "over-performance" — sojourning past historic sites, burger joints, public art, specific Valley architecture, and other such insider lore.[575] His practice intermingles artist, artwork, and audience, blurring the lines between creator and receiver — the participant literally sits beside Hernandez as they drive through the suburban streets, contributing to a shared, co-authored journey. Adjacency to the artist is crucial, producing an intimate experience of art as storytelling with a shared language between artist and participant.

The use of land and landscape is integral to Hernandez's work to transform the San Fernando Valley from backdrop to active participant. The Valley, frequently stereotyped as the backwater of glitzy Los Angeles, is known for porno movies, bank robberies, drab suburbs, and fast food chains, its image populated with the *Karate Kid* and the ubiquitous "Valley Girl." The act of touring and narrating is an invitation to interact with the land, not as

574 "Vincent Enrique Hernandez," Hammer Museum, accessed February 21, 2024, https://hammer.ucla.edu/made-la-2023-acts-living/vincent-enrique-hernandez.

575 Deborah Vankin, "This artist aims to prove Valley haters wrong with DIY 'performative' tours of the region," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 2023, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2023-09-01/vincent-enrique-hernandez-made-in-la-hammer-museum.

[Fig.55]

an image, but as a dynamic space with its own histories and trajectories and possibilities yet to be reimagined.[576] In Hernandez's tours, the passive viewer is transformed into active participant, co-creating and producing space beyond the Valley's inherited stereotypes. Driving in the Volvo along the hardened asphalt, making pit stops at Richie Valens's childhood home or passing the California Institute of Abnormal Arts or grabbing a snack on Sushi Row, all effectively dismantles the hierarchical distinctions between artist and audience and also rebalances the social and cultural perception of this landscape as something more complex, personal, and reflective of its actual status. Part of Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible is the reconfiguring of space, time, and forms of activity that determines ways in which the common is shared and political emancipation is made possible. Hernandez does this, creating an experience of art that is sensory and interpretive, redistributing the sensible by redefining who can speak, see, and participate in the creation of meaning. Subsequently, Hernandez transforms space, disrupting the landscape convention of passive reception by collapsing the experience of landscape that usually occurs from an admiring distance into one that positions the viewer right in the thick of it.

576 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005).

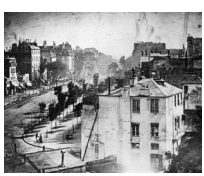
577 See Sekula's magnum opus on this topic: Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (London: MACK, 2018).

578 Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, *View of the Boulevard du Temple*, ca. 1838, photograph, in Allan Sekula, "An Eternal Esthetic of Laborious Gestures," in *Art Isn't Fair: Further Essays on the Traffic in Photographs and Related Media*, eds. Sally Stein and Ina Steiner (London: MACK, 2020), 159.

579 Sekula, "An Eternal Esthetic," in *Art Isn't Fair*, 160.

5.10 A MATERIAL VIEW

Where my "overlooks" and Hernandez's San Fernando interventions overlap is in their materialist sensibility, which also configure in Sekula's and Rancière's critical stance to reimagine an aesthetics reliant on other conditions other than its pure representation. To engage in the landscape, not just as an object of admiration but as a tangible entity, means foregrounding the physical, social, and economic infrastructures that shape and define such space. Sekula has suggested that photography often serves to reinforce the status quo by naturalizing and obscuring realities of the world, such as labour and class exploitation.[577] He articulated this in an analysis of Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's 1838 photograph *View of the Boulevard du Temple* [Fig.56].[578] In it, Daguerre takes a high-up position, overlooking a typical Parisian neighbourhood. Down below, barely visible, is the shape of a blurry figure, a man getting his shoes shined. While many analyses of this photograph speak of the man — a "dandy" — getting his shoes shined, Sekula points out the literal erasure of the bootblack by photographic technology and the representational regime of art, dissolved "into the abstract flux of buyers and sellers of labor power."[579] He argues that it is not just a limitation of early photographic technology (the need for long exposure times and the choice of composition) but is emblematic of cultural and ideological trends where physical and social realities became systematically excluded from cultural representation. Such analysis ties into Rancière's distribution of the sensible, as it directly pinpoints how certain forms and lives are excluded from visual representation and, by extension, from political life.



[Fig.56]

But where does this relate to landscape photography? As I previously discussed in Chapter 2, conventions of landscape representation often involves selective inclusion and exclusion, partly by its very nature as a "du-

plicitous" entity. Geographers like Stephen Daniels and Don Mitchell have each argued that landscape serves as an ideological tool that conceals its own making under a set of representational conventions, frequently presenting an idealized version of the world that aligns with the official or dominant cultural narratives, while simultaneously obscuring the social and historical processes that went into its making.[580] A convention of landscape photography is to take a view from a distant, privileged position, representing land as untouched and pure, ripe for individual renewal amidst nature.[581] As such, "the wilderness aesthetic thus worked to alienate viewers from everyday environments," says environmental historian Finis Dunaway, "and diminished their capacity to appreciate the modest beauty found in quotidian spaces."[582] This is indicative of landscape photography, whose selective representations are not just a depiction of physical space but also construct and reflect a reality that reinforces specific values and power structures.

A materialist sensibility in landscape photography is a tactic to redress the representational regime in art. When landscape, and photography, is conceived in a materialist way, it is possible to lift the veil on idealized and naturalized surfaces to address the underlying conditions that shape logistical landscapes, such as their succumbing to official status and resistance to scrutiny. For the *Bureau*, this means emphasizing the tangible aspects of landscape as a set of lived experiences, making perceptible what is usually left to the background or even entirely excluded from view. Hernandez, driving in his beat-up Volvo, challenges such abstraction — sitting inside a non-air-conditioned metal box traipsing through the San Fernando Valley side-by-side with the artist advocates for a grounded, material conception of landscape and artistic practice, as do my own "overlooks" installed throughout the Port of Rotterdam. These are what I term as interventions to disrupt the normative sensory order, where the overlooked and marginalized aspects of landscape come forward to challenge aesthetic hierarchies. Recalling Sekula and Rancière, landscape intervention advocates for a cultural and visual practice that acknowledges and comprehends the underpinnings of landscape representation as one explicitly tied to its socio-political origins.

5.11 THE BUREAU: APPARATUS FOR DISSENSUS

Intervention — as a mode of landscape engagement and as a distributor the sensible — finds solace in French philosopher Felix Guattari, who, in his publication *Three Ecologies*, proposes an "ecosophy," a search for dissident vectors through various acts of interruption within the traditional state to destabilize a homogenous culture.[583] Guattari suggests that only through new forms of creativity and subjectivity can we overcome the social and mental barriers that so far have prevented us from having a sustainable, productive relationship with the environment. He argues that capitalism — which can be ported to logistics because logistics functions as capital's lubricant — infuses into all aspects of social, economic, and cultural life, and also permeates our mental state, what he calls "intension."[584] The suggestion being that with new forms of subjectivity and creativity, we can

580 Stephen Daniels, "Marxism, Culture, and the Duplicity of Landscape," in *New Models in Geography* (London: Routledge, 1989), 196-220. And: Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

581 Finis Dunaway, "Beyond Wilderness: Robert Adams, New Topographics, and the Aesthetics of Ecological Citizenship," in *Reframing the New Topographics*, eds. Greg Foster-Rice and John Rohrbach (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago; Distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 2013), 43.

582 Dunaway, "Beyond Wilderness," 22.

583 Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: The Athlone Press, 2000).

584 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 50.

overcome social and mental barriers and have a sustainable relationship to our environment. He says that "we need new social and aesthetic practices, new practices of the Self in relation to the other, to the foreign, the strange – a whole programme that seems far removed from current concerns."[585] In light of this, Guattari emphasizes the role of reimagining engagement with the world, calling for a radical re-evaluation, with the cautionary insight that: "There is at least a risk that there will be no more human history unless humanity undertakes a radical reconsideration of itself."[586] Guattari's urgent reflections are mirrored in early-Soviet photographer Alexander Rodchenko's quest for a formal transformation of perceptual experience. He said that: "There's no revolution if, instead of making a general's portrait, photographers have started to photograph proletarian leaders — but are still using the same photographic approach that was employed under the old regime under the influence of Western art."[587] While Guattari wasn't focusing on photography, he did pay attention to new forms of creativity as a way to align with a world that has undergone massive change, thus necessitating a shift in how we perceive and interact with our environs.

Guattari invites interdisciplinary approaches where art comes into contact with other modes of engagement as a way to forge new conceptions of life. In an age of *Homo Logisticus*, which has radically altered land in its image while permeating everyday aspects of social life, the traditional conceptions of how we relate to land and landscape are outmoded, not dissimilar to making a "general's portrait" with irrelevant tools and histories. This interdisciplinarity is something I have already acknowledged as the "extra-photographic," and it is integral to the *Bureau*. Vital is harkening back to Guattari's quest for interruption to develop forms of destabilization. I understand Guattari's "ecosophy" as not solely actions of defiance nor even critique, but as actions of construction, proposing new ways to envision the visible, sayable, and thinkable. As such, there is a demand for change and for a break from dominant conventions and paradigms that govern our interactions, such as, in my case, in photography and the way logistics dominates the landscape. However, such transformation also disrupts the space of interruption: its mode of production and the subject matter. The *Bureau* falls into Guattari's orbit as it refuses to participate in the conventions of (photographic and landscape) narratives and allows for "dissident vectors" to influence its mode of production, for example through a focus on process over the finality of representation, its dissolution of authorial voice, or its invitation for citizens to participate in perceiving the logistical landscape outside any official remit. As such, the *Bureau's* format invites viewers to engage with the Port of Rotterdam in novel ways. Landscape and photography become mediums to question and reimagine relationships between subjects, objects, and their environments.[588] A marginal practice exploring marginal terrain is a departure from photography that traditionally relies on passive observation of the world, with it becoming instead an active participant in its re-creation and interpretation.

Rancière offers a practical suggestion for disruptive action by what he terms "dissensus," a way to challenge the "distribution of the sensible." He states that dissensus creates a "fissure in the sensible order by confronting the established framework of perception, thought, and action."[589] Dissensus goes far beyond mere disagreement, echoing Guattari's recon-

585 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 68.

586 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 68.

587 Alexander Rodchenko, "A Caution," in *Photography in The Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*," ed. Christopher Phillips (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Aperture, 1989), 264-66, quoted in Buchloh, "Allan Sekula: Photography between Discourse and Document," in Sekula, *Fish Story*, 197.

588 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*.

589 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 85.

struction, where an emergence of voices that were once exiled or overlooked may now contribute to reconfigure the dominant political order while also proposing alternative ways of seeing, thinking, and engaging with the everyday order of things. Dissensus, rather than consensus, asserts the individual rather than conforming to norms. As an action and a dynamic practice, dissensus works towards destabilizing political and aesthetic regimes while offering up possible other worlds that have yet to be imagined. Simply, it is a process that disrupts the established order of thought, perception, and action, by enabling fundamental disagreement with the consensus of any given community or space. Rancière states that consensus is a specific regime of the sensible, a regulatory principle that governs the organization of society. Consensus, he states, "reduces politics to the police," meaning that social hierarchy and distribution of power is naturalized by masking the political nature of such arrangements, a "system of coordinates" that defines modes of being, doing, and making.[590] Consensus, according to Rancière, is a state of apparent agreement that obscures the underlying exclusions and inequalities of the social order for the sake of maintaining stability by limiting what can be perceived, discussed, or imagined.[591]

The Port Authority of Rotterdam is an official landscape. Thus, in addition to its various interpretive networks, like *FutureLand* and its official guidebook, *The Port of Rotterdam: World Between City and Sea*, it also delineates the visible, sayable, and thinkable of that space. Rancière's "police" is an apt term to describe the mechanisms and practices that establish the Port's consensus. "Police," for Rancière, is a system that establishes and maintains the social status quo through the enforcement of rules and conventions. It is both symbolic and practical, transcending law enforcement to include regulatory functions that control the visible and sayable within society. He contrasts police with politics: while the police work to sustain the order of the visible, politics, for Rancière, is the activity that disrupts this order.[592] Politics occurs when individuals or groups who are normally excluded from consensus — outside frameworks established by police — assert their presence and challenge the distribution of the sensible and the prescribed order. Politics, according to Rancière, is relational in nature, and "founded on the intervention of politics in the police order rather than on the establishment of a particular governmental regime."[593] The *Bureau* is an act of politics that incorporates the extra-photographic to enact its dissensus within the consensus of official — police — space. In practical terms, this means introducing new subjects and objects into the official fields of perception. This could simply be my own presence that registers as a political agent within the official landscape, signalling to the authorities like an anomoly in the machine, or it could entail the gathering of citizens on tours through the Port of Rotterdam and the implementation of various "overlooks" that reframe the Port as a more-than-official space. The *Bureau* gathers these various acts of dissensus to reconfigure the Port's sensory experience by addressing the "police" allocation of what can be seen, said, or thought within this landscape. Politics, Rancière reminds us, is a dynamic and disruptive process that is continually renegotiating the terms of life.[594]

Dissensus shares attributes with Kwon's ideas of liminal practice, as both speak to the possibilities that transition, ambiguity, and the marginal and

590 On consensus, see: Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 83. And: Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 89.

591 Rancière. *Politics of Aesthetics*.

592 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 89.

593 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 3.

594 Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 56.

exiled can produce a force to open up other vistas that are not captured in the singular, dominant view.[595] The *Bureau* is simultaneously dissensual and liminal because it nestles into the ambiguous spaces between established categories, interrupting the dominant order of logistical space while contesting the accepted logic of the landscape genre in photography. There is a refusal of conventions, and satisfaction lies in searching upon the uncertain and ambiguous terrain of the in-between for alternative pathways outside the status quo. Sliding into such pockets ensures that my artistic practice stays within the realm of "politics," and not "police," shedding any distinctions that the consensus dictates, for example, in landscape photography, or for that matter, in how the Port may be perceived. Dissensus is the simultaneous transgression of the representational regime in art and a compelling way to make the logistical landscape accessible and visible, even when it remains obscured or unnoticed. The *Bureau*, then, is an apparatus of dissensus, eager to distribute the sensible across its own disciplinary boundaries, and across the official landscape, reconfiguring each outside the consensus. Through such acts of dissensus, the *Bureau* enables me to not just challenge but to assist in reconstructing, and even potentially transforming, the "policed" nature of both my subject matter (logistical landscapes) and my practice (landscape photography) — perhaps, even, gradually encouraging the citizen, while visiting the Port of Rotterdam, to have a complex, personal relationship with that site and understand how it permeates us socially, culturally, and mentally — to recall Guattari's "intensions."

595 Rancière. *Politics of Aesthetics.*

5.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated how the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes* reimagines engagement with the logistical landscape, challenging traditional conventions, perceptions and hierarchies through artistic interventions. By taking an interventionist approach, the *Bureau* recalibrates public perceptions of landscape, enhancing its legibility. Adopting a quasi-institutional guise and incorporating bureaucratic mimicry, such an infrastructure like the *Bureau* initiates alternative perceptions of the official landscape. Infused with the theoretical underpinnings of Jacques Rancière's politics of aesthetics, I have illustrated how the *Bureau* uses dissensus to dissipate the power relations of the Port of Rotterdam, redistributing visibility and participation to shed light on the unseen and overlooked. Incorporating Rancière's theories as a critical component of landscape photography promotes dialogue, reflection, and the exploration of new possibilities, reconfiguring the relationship between the public, institutions, and the logistical landscape. The *Bureau* is not only a riposte to the site's power relations, but it is also a challenge to the limits of landscape photography. The *Bureau* activates landscape into a verb, emphasizing process over finality, valuing the experiential and material over the fixed and representational. Thus, the *Bureau* is a reimagined practice of landscape photography, offering an "other" model for interpreting and disseminating the cultural inscription of logistics within the landscape.

With the *Bureau's* framework now firmly established, the next chapter takes a wider view and positions artistic-cum-geographic precedents to situate the *Bureau* within a genealogy of critical land-based practices. I introduce two pivotal practices: the *Center for Land Use Interpretation*, whom I have mentioned throughout, and the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers*. These groups exemplify novel ways of engaging with land and landscape by blending artistic practice actioned through a variety of methods with critical inquiry. Each of the groups challenges the convention of landscape as an object that is gazed upon, and instead considers land as a dynamic, ever-transient body rife with cultural, political, and economic significance. I present these two organizations — and the term organization is crucial here, as both are comprised of a multiplicity of people and disciplines that also qualify as quasi-institutional — to reinforce my assertion that landscape engagement is not simply an act of visual representation, but that participatory and operative interactions are indispensable for its interpretation and meaning construction. By presenting these organizations, I not only draw inspiration for the *Bureau*, but I also position it within a robust framework that emphasizes an integrated and interactive approach to landscape.

CH 06

LEARN-ING FROM LOS ANGELES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I do not argue for, but instead learn from. I introduce two organizations that serve as precedents and examples of aspirational goals for the *Bureau*: the *Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI)* and the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers (LAUR),* each posing as a framework to which I can align my own analysis and narrative for the *Bureau*. I do not just pay homage to the influential work of each organization, but I also utilize them to position this research in a larger dialogue on landscape, culture, and photography. Situating the *Bureau* within this milieu is a learning exercise, acknowledging what has come before and how I may expand, and contribute, to what has been started. In this final chapter, the *CLUI* and the *LAUR* illustrate how theoretical and artistic practices can be applied in real-world landscapes, offering influential advice to the *Bureau* on understanding how similar practices approach land use interpretation and public engagement.

While the scope of this dissertation cannot present a full art historical analysis of these two artist-cum-geography-cum-interpretation centre-cum-park service-cum-land use administrative agencies, there is still specific insight for the *Bureau* to glean from how such endeavours use artistic and geographic (and administrative) methods as a model. The *CLUI* and the *Rangers* are exemplary at fusing art and geography, unified under an institutional and administrative rubric that leverages the site's geographic record for a sustainable understanding of place.[596] Under the guise of a quasi-public institution, each "artist-ensemble" has been able to extend their findings beyond exclusive modes of address and instead prove accessible to a public of everyday, ordinary use, asserting physical space as a legitimate form of inquiry.[597] Both subscribe to a common mission of invoking individual understanding and appreciation of the surrounding environment, be it on the *CLUI's* national scale, or the *Urban Rangers's* urban level. Humour and small doses of irony are central to their make-up as a way to provoke, spark, or contest official narratives of space, with a common goal of encouraging the everyday citizen to develop meaningful connections with their surroundings, regardless of how distant, obscured, or familiar they may be.

I start Chapter 6 with the *CLUI*, presenting an overview of this unique agency before introducing specific diffusion methods that prove relevant for my purposes. In particular, I place emphasis on specific tactics such as their Land Use Database, site-based tours, and exhibitions, as each discursive method produces multiple perspectives and interpretations of varied land uses across the continental United States. Next, I introduce the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers* who have appropriated the persona of the park ranger in a bid to encourage citizens to reexamine their urban surroundings with a sense of wonder and curiosity typically reserved for Nature and wilderness. By researching into their practices and specific modes of interpretation, I want to know how these methodological and conceptual frameworks can assist the *Bureau* in crafting my own set of interpretative interventions. Positioning the *Bureau* within their orbit is a way to align myself with other groups that utilize art as a tool of engagement and experience, and not just of critique, which lends

596 Nicholas Bauch and Emily Eliza Scott, "The Los Angeles Urban Rangers: Actualizing Geographic Thought," *Cultural Geographies* 19, no. 3 (2012): 401.

597 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 401.

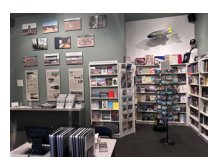
legitimacy to my own academic and artistic pursuits. A sub-question that runs through this chapter is asking how can art, by incorporating an institutional and diffuse structure, engage the public in meaningful dialogues about land use and its implications? The *CLUI* and the *Rangers* offer insight. The lessons learned here make their way into the final section of this dissertation, Bureau Mission Three.

6.2 THE CENTER FOR LAND USE INTERPRETATION

In Culver City, California — a place with a grander-sounding name that far outstrips its reality — wedged between the Santa Monica Freeway, an In-N-Out Burger, and the Museum of Jurassic Technology sits the *Center for Land Use Interpretation*, or the *CLUI* for short, headquartered in what looks to be an ersatz Frank Lloyd Wright building, perhaps designed by an ex-pupil whose firm teeters on the edge of bankruptcy. In much of the literature surrounding the *CLUI*, its location in a nondescript building on a nondescript block in a nondescript part of Los Angeles is usually noted. Nothing is laudable about this site. It could be plunked down anywhere in some random, mid-size American city, surrounded by a similar set of traffic lights, electrical poles, and rusted bus stop benches advertising things like Goat Global, "A Vertically Integrated Cannabis Lifestyle Brand," with other paraphernalia of the contemporary urban environment littering the scenery. Perhaps the only standout thing about the *Center*'s location is its neighbour, the aforementioned Museum of Jurassic Technology, or that the "world's shortest Main Street," barely even a block long, is just around the corner. Other than that, there's not much to go on. Its anonymity is part of its character — and mission. Upon alighting at the *CLUI's* building, I had slight difficulty in locating them as the only identifying factor is a dull logo in the vague style of some bureaucratic land agency listlessly tacked onto the exterior. To get inside, you have to ring a buzzer, where a voice cracks out and asks what you're there for: dropping off mail or viewing the exhibition?

Founded in 1994 by Matthew Coolidge, or, rather, that's the year he filed its papers, the *CLUI*'s mission statement is "dedicated to the increase and diffusion of knowledge about how the nation's lands are apportioned, utilized, and perceived."[598] Inside the *CLUI's* non-descript building, past the wall covered in tourist brochures, there is a small, softly lit exhibition space painted in what could pass for moss green, perhaps even the colour of landscape, featuring interactive touchscreens and foam board-mounted maps and other types of images. At the time of my visit, the current exhibition was *Designing Experience: Harpers Ferry and the Interpretive Infrastructure of the National Park Service* (very relevant for my own research). Adjacent is a little bookstore, a postcard stand ($1 each), and the inevitable swag of coffee mugs and tote bags emblazoned with their banal logo [Fig.57]. In the back office, I spied a teetering pile of books laden with author Mark Monmonier's *How to Lie With Maps*; in that same stack, photographer Richard Misrach and Kate Orff's *Petrochemical America*, political activist Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums* and, forming its base, the appropriately titled *Land Art*. In here, there is a sense of an infinite expanse comprised of the minutiae of land use in the

598 On "papers being filed," see: Jeffrey Kastner, "A Talk with Center for Land Use Interpretation's Matthew Coolidge," *Artforum*, accessed February 22, 2024. On the CLUI's mission, see: The Center for Land Use Interpretation, accessed February 22, 2024, https://clui.org/.



[Fig.57]

continental USA; perhaps every artifact ever produced in the American landscape has a little index card attached to it, complete with jotted notes on the back, labelled for posterity and squeezed into the last free space of a filing cabinet, ready for when, for whatever reason, someone will pop it open, look at this fact, and do something with it.

In recent years, artist groups have begun to feed from the geographic discipline, challenging and expanding what it means to practice and produce geography today.[599] The *CLUI* is probably the alpha point of such disciplinary co-habitation. American art critic Ralph Rugoff pinpoints the *CLUI's* approach as "not so much multidisciplinary as nondisciplinary."[600] Exhibitions, tours, publications, residency programs, archives and, probably most significantly, their Land Use Database, all surrender to "finding new meanings in the intentional and incidental forms that we individually and collectively create."[602] Rugoff suggests the "real subject" of the *Center* is "how we look at, and conceptualize, the world around us."[602] Paradoxically, while the *CLUI* thrives in gathering many perspectives of the landscape, they'd also "rather people forget us."[603] This inconspicuous attitude is also inherent in the name itself, conjuring some mid-level administrative backwater responsible for regional sewage treatment or something similar. Yet the serious implication hidden within that almost-ironic moniker — the *Center for Land Use Interpretation* — is that by partaking in sustained attention to the often overlooked and undervalued aspects of land use, a genuine understanding of the phenomena that conditions everyday life can be achieved.

The *CLUI*'s interests, says the British writer Nicola Twilley, are the overlooked yet telling traces of the continental American landscape, with the organization using insatiable curiosity to facilitate some kind of reckoning with these marks as a sign of culture.[604] The *CLUI's* value lies in not pretending a forensic analysis, but placing intense scrutiny on the infinite marks of land use to provide wisdom into sites we never thought to consider, much less care about. The *Center* functions as a kind of annotation service for the ordinary citizen to navigate the visible scratches left upon the Earth's surface by humans. They position land as an embodiment of physical acts that renders society visible, helping to shape the world and how we think about it. Coolidge, the *CLUI*'s founder, says that their preference is the simultaneously banal and strange of the American landscape, oddities that have profound influence on our daily actions yet are often disregarded as overlooked and hidden amidst our own casual prejudice towards sites that enable our existence.[605] This overlooked condition is not just manifested from the careless average citizen but also reflects places "left unexplored by scholars, scientists, and other specialists."[606] The *CLUI*'s desire, as expressed by Coolidge, is to give due attention to "these corridors and vistas, and to trip over all the protruding artifacts of the present on the way to explaining the extraordinary conditions we all find ourselves in all of the time."[607]

Land, in their conception, is not ageless nor pure. Recalling landscape essayist J.B. Jackson's degenerate landscapes that I referenced in Chapter 4, the *CLUI* does not harken back for a sublime or sentimental depiction of nature as something to be re-presented, nor do they bother to reflect on the past as a way to flush the accumulated sins of the present (if anything they celebrate these sins).[608] By emphasizing "the multiplicity of points

599 Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson, "Introduction: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Land Use," in *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, eds. Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 1. Specific to photography, curator Marta Dahó goes into detail regarding what she describes as the "geographical turn" in contemporary photography: Marta Dahó, "Landscape and the Geographical Turn in Photographic Practice," *Photographies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 227-248.

600 Ralph Rugoff, "Circling the Center," *Overlook: Exploring America's Internal Fringes with the Center for Land Use Interpretation*, eds. Matthew Coolidge and Sarah Simons (New York: Metropolis Books, 2006), 39.

601 "About the Center," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 22, 2024, https://clui.org/about-center.

602 Rugoff, "Circling the Center," 35.

603 Matthew Coolidge, "Introduction," in *Overlook: Exploring America's Internal Fringes with the Center for Land Use Interpretation*, eds. Matthew Coolidge and Sarah Simons (New York: Metropolis Books, 2006), 15.

604 Nicola Twilley, "Finding Tarzan at the Sanitation Department," *Good*, April 12, 2011, accessed February 18, 2024, https://www.good.is/articles/finding-tarzan-at-the-sanitation-department.

605 Emily Eliza Scott, "Undisciplined Geography: Notes from the Field of Contemporary Art," in *Geohumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place*, eds. Michael Dear, Jim Ketchum, Sarah Luria, and Douglas Richardson (London: Routledge, 2011), 52.

606 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 52.

607 Coolidge, "Introduction," in *Overlook*, 16-17, quoted in Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 52.

608 J.B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins, and Other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

of view regarding the utilization of terrestrial and geographic resources," the *CLUI* destabilizes the naturalizing tendencies of landscape and instead points out that land is always modified by some kind of geomorphological agent.[609] The human, in such a frame, is integral to any landscape.

6.3 UNUSUAL AND EXEMPLARY

A typical CLUI site — or, rather, what they would deem "exemplary" — would be a location that thrives in the supposed non-places of nowhere. Taking a random sampling from their website, you can find sites like the Opheim Radar Base located just a few kilometres south of the Canadian border; cyanide heap-leaching gold mines; dams; radioactive disposal cells sunken deep in the deserts of Nevada; the Simplot Caldwell Potato Plant, credited with inventing the frozen french fry industry; data centres; paper mills; Oregon's Depoe Bay harbour, claiming the title of "world's smallest"; smelter mines; the Bravo-20 bombing range; cold storage warehouses; electronic warfare test ranges; land artist Walter de Maria's Las Vegas Piece; and the list goes on and on.[610] What unites these seemingly disparate sites is their peripheral condition as guarded and protected landscapes that are often cast into the margins of the hinterland. While not totally invisible sites, they are not exactly prone to visibility, either. The Center, then, explores the circumference.[611] For the CLUI, the exemplary is an important part of their interpretive project, and they state that, "Artifacts are meaningless without interpretation. [...] With interpretation they become something."[612]

This collision of human and land enterprise as an interpretive method invokes artistic and geographic practices suspending the *CLUI* in a kind of ambiguous, peripheral state. American curator and art critic Lucy Lippard suggests that the *Center* occupies "a tantalizing liminal space [that] has opened up between disciplines, between the arts, geography, history, archeology, sociology."[613] Neither artist nor technician, nor archivist or tour guide, the *CLUI* adapts a persona that falls between disciplines, creating an ambiguous character that never quite befits any one specific category. Rather, this disciplinary mixing implies "anonymity in the non-hierarchical structure of the 'organization,' the 'agency': the *Center*."[614] Such a position allows the *Center* to adopt an almost wilful neutrality, refusing to signal their ties to any one particular position. Almost wilful, because Coolidge does hedge and offers that their neutrality is more of a perception placed onto them from outside, a cautious uncertainty in an era where, he says, "people are used to things being super overtly political, and activisty, which we are not."[615]

The *Center* cultivates this ambiguity, but it is reflective of the agency they are: one interested in overlooked sites that construct the continental United States from the margins and periphery, thus never able to declare or stake any one singular position from the centre. For the *CLUI*, the Earth's surface is a highly cultivated form for human communication. "Humans," Coolidge says, "are a part of nature, and nature shouldn't be something considered exclusive of humans."[616] In the *CLUI's* world, there is no binary between nature and human; instead, they categorize land use as a diverse form of communication

609 "About the Center," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 18, 2024, https://clui.org/about-center.

610 I highly recommend some hours poking about its interface. See: "Land Use Database," The Center for Land Use Interpretation, accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/ludb.

611 Michael Ned Holte, "The Administrative Sublime or The Center for Land Use Interpretation at the Circumference," *Afterall* 13 (Spring/Summer 2006): 20.

612 The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "It Takes One: Matthew Coolidge," July 17, 2019, accessed February 19, 2024, https://www.tclf.org/it-takes-one-matthew-coolidge.

613 Lucy Lippard, "Imagine Being Here Now: Towards a Multicentered Exhibition Process," The Falmouth Convention, accessed February 19, 2024, https://thefalmouthconvention.com/record-2/keynote-lucy-lippard-2/keynote-lucy-lippard.

614 Holte, "The Administrative Sublime," 20.

615 LuLing Osofsky, "Interview with Matthew Coolidge of the Center for Land Use Interpretation," *Creative Ecologies*, April 2017, accessed February 19, 2024, https://creativeecologies.ucsc.edu/extraction-clui-interview/.

616 Kate L. Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic: Anthropic Landscapes of the Center for Land Use Interpretation," *Afterimage* 25, no. 2 (October 1, 1997): 3.

that requires a panoply of voices to ensure its meaning and value. They inform us that: "The strip mine, the nuclear proving ground, the aqueduct, and the Spiral Jetty each have something to say about us, and collectively, such geo-transformations constitute the language of land use" [Figs. 58, 59, 60, 61].[617]

Returning to their broader operations, while many might initially presume them an arts-based institution — given their funding through various organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts and others — the *CLUI* deflects narrow classifications and prefers to emphasize their intrinsic ambiguity and wider cultural significance.[618] Theirs is a peripheral state, happily ensconced in the liminal conditions of disciplinary travel. Their's is a model that stands apart from traditional institutions that shape artistic expectation. As an artistic practice *and* cultural geographers, the *Center* exists in a perpetual "not-quite" state: they don't quite strictly adhere to the confines and expectations of artistic mediums, nor do they quite follow the rigorous empirical methods typically demanded from geography.[619] Their chosen medium, the human-induced landscape, echoes artistic practices without being bound by them. Similarly, while their focus on land and its analysis aligns with geographic thought, they diverge from its standards. As such, the *CLUI* can be described as unruly; curator Nato Thompson has called them the "Andy Warhol in the field of geography," while Lippard labels the *CLUI* unpredictable and casual, deploying "a humorous fusion of geography and art."[620] The *CLUI*, Lippard mentions, are an example "of a new conceptual art, a forward-thinking art about place in a broader, more social and analytical sense."[621] To me, this is why the *CLUI* is relevant, as their work is a counterpoint to the hierarchies of both disciplines, preferring to engage a generalized public effected on a daily basis by land use conditions and transformations.[622]

6.4 DIFFUSION METHODS

The *Center for Land Use Interpretation* is just that — a centre for interpretation — which means they operate on a functional and aesthetic basis, offering a multitude of discursive projects that cut across an array of programming, such as exhibitions, publishing, site-based tours, and other actions all designed to put people in direct experiential contact with the land and contribute to the diffusion of land use knowledge.[623] However, it is not so straightforward to sever their activities into distinct blocks as they are a dispersed institution, constantly shifting and rearranging priorities and working methods. Shortly, I will examine in-depth three particular diffusion methods that have resonance for the *Bureau*, but for now, I present a quick overview of some supplementary actions of the *CLUI*. I use the following brief examples to sketch out the expansive undertaking that is the *CLUI*, noting that to reduce them to a few interpretive gestures does not do justice to their complexity and richness as an institution dedicated to land use and its perception.

First up, the *American Land Museum* is "a museum both situated and made up of the landscapes of America."[624] With the *CLUI*'s museum, the land itself becomes the exhibition, its discovery occurring mostly through the internet and in the field, alongside a roving cast of intermittent and flexible interpre-

617 Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic," 3.

618 "Acknowledgements," The Center for Land Use Interpretation, accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/about-center/acknowledgements.

619 Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic," 3.

620 On Andy Warhol reference, see: Nato Thompson, "In Two Directions: Geography as Art, Art as Geography," in *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House; New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), 15. On Lippard's designation of humour, see: "What Some People Say About the Center," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/about-center/what-some-people-say-about-center.

621 Lippard, "Imagine Being Here Now."

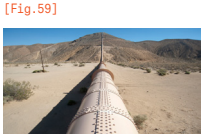
622 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 53.

623 Kastner, "A Talk with The Center for Land Use Interpretation."

624 Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic," 5.

[Fig.58]

[Fig.59]



[Fig.60]

[Fig.61]

tive centres and publishing initiatives. The *CLUI* has a small publishing arm, releasing affordable and cheaply produced guidebooks, pamphlets, postcards, and catalogues. One in particular, *The Nevada Test Site: A Guide to America's Proving Ground,* is fitting of the *CLUI's* ambiguity, with them proudly proclaiming: "Praised by both anti-nuclear activists and Department of Energy officials!"[625] In addition to such publications, the *CLUI* sends out a subscriber's-only newsletter on a near-yearly basis, featuring a smorgasbord of land-centric data [Fig.62]. The design is straightforward, perhaps teetering on irony, yet the newsletter is filled with enough earnestness to wash away any potential cynicism. It clearly mimics some internal newsletter similar to that which a mid-grade bureaucratic institution might put out. It is densely packed, absconding with any whitespace, taken up instead by facts written in a breezy tone with a surprising number of photos.[626]

Another *CLUI* initiative are their regional outposts and research stations that support an array of artist residencies and public contact stations, host exhibitions, or function as project support centres. Over the years, the *CLUI* has operated multiple outposts, some for just a few months, others as years-long projects, and some continuously. In addition to their Culver City headquarters, currently operating outposts are the Desert Research Station in California's sparse Mojave desert [Fig.63]; the Swansea interpretive centre in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California [Fig.64]; and, since 1996, their longest serving outpost is located at an old military airbase in Wendover, Utah [Fig.65].[627] In a typical gesture that is indicative of the *CLUI*'s point of view on land use matters, it is no surprise (nor accident) to learn that they chose to settle this latter research outpost at a decommissioned airfield: Wendover was the departure point for the Enola Gay, the B-29 Superfortress bomber that would be the first to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and the site is within a three-hour's drive radius of artist Nancy Holt's Sun Tunnels, Smithson's Spiral Jetty, and a radioactive waste site.[628]

In the following sections, I share three diffusion methods in detail. Each one has relevance for the Bureau's own interpretive interventions as they demonstrate how artistic, geographic, and administrative methods can imaginatively engage and interpret landscape. I use the first example, the Land Use Database, as a way to understand an effective use of language and facts to create a rich and unpredictable outcome that is simultaneously interpretive and educational. The CLUI's approach to dialogue shows the Bureau how, through straightforward, almost deadpan text, latent cultural and social narratives can be revealed in mundane or overlooked sites, creating additional knowledge alongside the official. In the second example, I inspect a particular exhibition by focusing on how the CLUI reaches diverse audiences beyond the art world's infrastructure of exclusive space by bringing their research directly into the field. While the Bureau — for now — is not necessarily producing exhibitions, how the CLUI sets up public interaction on location to instigate dialogue about land use is vital for my own interpretive interventions. Finally, the last example I use is the site-based tour, for which the CLUI is renowned. The CLUI's bus tours resonate for the Bureau, as they produce an entertaining and droll experience, signalling that direct and embodied experience of the landscape is crucial for geographic awareness. The bus tour showcases to the Bureau how my site-based tour can, through contact with the land, enable a different form of public legibility and reflection. Each of these three examples

625 "Nevada Test Site: A Guide to America's Nuclear Proving Ground," *Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed May 20, 2023, https://clui.org/section/nevada-test-site-a-guide-americas-nuclear-proving-ground.

626 "The Lay of the Land," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/newsletter.

627 "CLUI Locations," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/clui-locations.

628 "CLUI Wendover," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/clui-locations/clui-wendover.

[Fig.62]

[Fig.63]

[Fig.64]

[Fig.65]

proves consequential in the remaining Bureau Mission, where I define the Bureau's interpretive interventions, learning from the CLUI how an interdisciplinary and interactive approach addresses the complexities of human–land relations.

6.5 INFORMATIONAL BEDROCK: THE LAND USE DATABASE

In my view, the *CLUI*'s greatest contribution to land use discourse is the Land Use Database [Fig.66]. An extension of their Culver City HQ, it is best exemplified through its online incarnation, extending Robert Smithson's site/non-site dialectic and morphing it into a trialectic: site/non-site/website.[629] Coolidge stresses that cyberspace (or infospace) is as much a part of space today as physical space.[630] The Land Use Database is the expression of this multi-layered conception, functioning as a "scalable system where you can look for new relationships, juxtapositions, and contexts based on where and how you're looking."[631] The database houses over a thousand "unusual and exemplary" sites organized by state and further shuffled into various land use categories as defined by the *Center*: Industrial Sites, Mining Sites, Military Facilities, Nuclear/Radioactive Sites, Research and Development Sites, Waste Sites, Water Sites, Transportation Sites, and Cultural Sites.[632] To pass muster and qualify for inclusion, a site must be deemed "exemplary" by meeting specific criteria; if sufficient, a *CLUI* representative makes their way to the site and produces a field report, "a physical portrait of the site's mechanisms."[633]

For example, take the state of Nevada as a random sampling: the most obvious inclusion here is the Nellis Range Complex, one of the largest and most restricted military ranges, which includes a nuclear weapons stockpile and a maximum security prison; moving on, there's the Guru Road, a quarter-mile stretch containing dozens of witticisms from its maker, Doobie, with hand-painted slogans on rocks such as "COME ON YOU CAN DO IT" or the less savoury, "SCRATCH YOUR ASS"; then there are entries for some Land Art. Micheal Heizer features multiple times with his Isolated Mass, Circumflex, and Double Negative. Moving on in the database, you can find Apple's Reno Data Center, and, of course, multiple mines and nuclear repositories, like Yucca Mountain, the only such repository reserved for commercial use.[634] Each entry is written in plain language, indicative of the *Center*, with a dose of humour and self-awareness, but the entries remain mostly straightforward and practical, laced with facts, data, and information. A typical entry has a Google Earth link for aerial viewing, accompanied (at times) with a set of photographs, testimony to the *CLUI* representative's field visit with camera in hand.[635] A sample text, taken from the Area 51 Research Center (not *the* Area 51, which features in its own entry in the database, found under its official name, Groom Lake, a part of the larger Nellis Range Complex; this would be its anomalous, idiosyncratic mirror) reads:

629 Kastner, "A Talk with The Center for Land Use Interpretation."

630 Kastner, "A Talk with The Center for Land Use Interpretation."

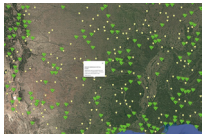
631 Kastner, "A Talk with The Center for Land Use Interpretation."

632 "Land Use Database," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/ludb. See also: Coolidge, *Overlook*, 19.

633 Coolidge, *Overlook*, 22.

634 All entries can be found in the Land Use Database: "Land Use Database," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/ludb.

635 The *CLUI* rarely use existing photographs, regardless of whether they're available or not; By producing photographs themselves, they offer an independent view of site verification. See: Coolidge, *Overlook*, 22.



[Fig.66]

Now closed down, until a few years ago this trailer was jam-packed with information on the nearby secret base (the Groom Lake Base, located inside Area 51 of the Air Force's Nellis Range Complex). The Research Center was founded by Glenn Campbell, the independent secrecy-watchdog and UFO researcher (who, in some circles, is now better known than the singer of the same name). Campbell retired from his pioneering Area 51 research in the late 1990s, and the Research Center was later operated by other people. The nearby Little A-Le Inn, one of two commercial establishments in the tiny town of Rachel, has more speculative UFO-related information and serves hamburgers.[636]

All this is made freely accessible through the *CLUI's* web platform. Considered their "informational bedrock," the database provides the source material for the many exhibitions, public programming, tours, and other interpretive initiatives.[637] In such a rigorous examination of how land use is utilized, apportioned, shaped, and interpreted, potential for various associations and interconnections become apparent. "The database," according to the *CLUI*, "is a tool to explore remotely, to search obliquely, and to make creative collisions and juxtapositions that render new meanings and explanations of America — and the many ways of looking at it."[638] This encourages viewers to perceive their inhabited (and not-so-inhabited) landscapes in novel and unorthodox ways. By promoting such an approach, the *CLUI* interrupts and intervenes into conventional views of the landscape. What might start as an exploration into the seemingly mundane and nearly banal soon begins to escalate and radiate outwards, revealing connections that perhaps would never be conceived of if somebody doesn't stumble upon this database. For instance, when browsing through the database seeking information about the famous western cowboy town Dodge City, now known for its cattle feedyards and slaughthouses, references to the Koch Fertilizer Company pop up, noting this corporation is the second largest privately held company in the USA (after Cargill).[639] Art historian Emily Eliza Scott summarizes such a confounding set of interactions in a sentiment that echoes the *Center* itself, describing it as the "the dynamic and uncontainable nature of the built American landscape."[640] The *CLUI's* goal with the Land Use Database is to showcase how the world is continually transforming and to present new frameworks for inciting engagement, aligning with the Land Use Database's mission to educate the public about the national landscape, a system altered to meet society's complex demands.

6.6 THE CENTRE EXISTS IN MANY PLACES

Since its founding three decades ago, the *CLUI* has produced dozens of exhibitions. However, in this section, I focus on only one: 2012's *Centers of the USA,* which looked at multiple centres of the United States (nine in total), all rightly claiming to occupy some kind of centre of the nation.[641] The *CLUI's* point was that any centre is un-centralized; they are simultaneously anywhere

636 "Area 51 Research Center, Nevada," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/ludb/site/area-51-research-center.

637 Coolidge, *Overlook*, 17.

638 Coolidge, *Overlook*, 17.

639 Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic," 4.

640 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 53.

641 Plato, Missouri professes to be the United States's population centre, while its geodetic centre is located a few kilometres outside the tiny village of Osborne, Kansas. A few hundred kilometres further away, its geographic centre can be found near Belle Fourche, South Dakota. See: The Center for Land Use Interpretation, "Center's Centers of the USA Tours Centers of the USA," *The Lay of the Land* (Winter 2012), accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/newsletter/winter-2012/centers-centers-usa-tours-centers-usa.

and everything. The word "Center" in the title of the exhibition and in the *CLUI's* name is paradoxical and perhaps even ironic; their own centre is barely perceptible to the passersby, located in a city that famously has no centre. "Centers" — plural — is a clue to understanding the show, but also the *CLUI* itself. The *Center's* work is peripheral, dedicated to overlooked and ill-considered sites that are perpetually on the margins of sight and consciousness, yet through efforts like this exhibition, the *CLUI* pulls them into focus.

Consider some documentation of this exhibition, indicative of the *CLUI*'s relationship to institutional practices of art. While the *CLUI* headquarters in Culver City hosted the primary show, *Centers of the USA* travelled across the United States in classic American road trip fashion, towing what they grandly deemed a "mobile exhibit hall," about the same size of a shipping container [Fig.67].[642] The exhibition space looks like it would barely fit a dozen people at most, a rectangular box on wheels towed by a pick-up truck with the *CLUI's* logo stuck on the outside. Its exterior is nondescript: a door and a couple of caged-up windows; inside, a linoleum floor and cheap wood-panelled walls. The exhibit traveled to places in Missouri like the towns of Tightwad and Peculiar, where they would set up shop, swing open the doors, and invite guests to peruse the exhibition. Inside, about ten foam panels featured a large photo at the top, followed by a strip of smaller pictures, with a map and text block. Over the course of the summer, the boards looked like they began to buckle, humidity attacking the glue-mounted photographs. All very didactic, portable, and unpretentious [Fig.68].

The exhibition operates as a metaphor for the larger questions the *CLUI* themselves raise about land and landscape: the idea of a centre — as something fixed and absolute — is impossible, an illusory notion that is always under negotiation. *Centers of the USA* subscribes to geographer Doreen Massey's notion of "terms of engagement," where the spatial and temporal nature of encounter is always dynamic, a fluid process of exchange where many trajectories coalesce in addition to the seemingly singular one that we are all on. For Massey, "space is always therefore, in a sense, unfinished (except that 'finishing' is not on the agenda). If you were really to take a slice through time it would be – in this sense – full of holes, of discontinuities, of tentative half-formed first encounters; space being made."[643] The *CLUI's* mobile trip across the various centres of the USA restates their preference for remaining marginalized, less interested in iconic acts of image production. The *CLUI* engages with the public — and land — as facilitators, foregrounding the process and not necessarily concerned with its outcomes. To end this excursion through a typical *CLUI* exhibition, I note a sign that was printed and hung on the wall of the display space, which said, simply: "The center exists in many places, one of which is here."

642 *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, "Center's Centers of the USA Tours Centers of the USA," *The Lay of the Land* (Winter 2012), accessed February 19, 2024, https://clui.org/newsletter/winter-2012/centers-centers-usa-tours-centers-usa.

643 Doreen Massey, "Some Times of Space," in *Olafur Eliasson: The Weather Project*, ed. Simon May (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 117.

[Fig.67]

[Fig.68]

6.7 EARTH: A BUS TOUR THROUGH THE OWENS VALLEY

For years now, I have been trying to become a tourist on one of the *CLUI's* legendary bus tours; they normally sell out within minutes and occur only infrequently. While I was hoping for firsthand experience, for now I have to

settle for secondary accounts. A *CLUI* tour mashes the banal and dramatic as a way to introduce the average citizen to the things that function in the foreground of everyday lives, yet are hardly ever considered for inspection.[644] Coolidge insists such site-based tours are ones of anticipation, where the audience gazes out big picture windows and sees the outside as fertile ground that allows for the growth of new ideas.[645] The guide is narrator and host, providing continuity as a medium, not subject, and, according to Coolidge, is a shaman-like character, pointing things out.[646] *CLUI* tours emphasize inspiration over recreation, elaborately considered and designed to reveal to their captive audience various potentials that lie within the landscape. According to the *CLUI*, their tours are collaborations between participants and the *Center* itself, each collectively engaged in a form of "research."[647] Theirs is a highly mediated "multimedia phenomenological experience," a "spatio-temporal, nonfictional, theatre production brought to the landscape."[648] The bus itself is a locational medium, where its internal infrastructure — windows, TV monitors, radio — all become a part of the experience [Fig.69].[649] Inside, support material assembled by the guide also contributes to the mediating experience of the tour, supplementing the view out the window. Such accoutrements of mediation create an experience between multimedia and physical space, where "time and space can be folded, shrinking long distances between things."[650] However, while all these media offer compelling adjuncts to experience, the tour is still located within a specific site, beyond the frame of the big picture windows, in real space. This is where knowledge accrues; mediation is simply supportive.

I will now turn to one particular *CLUI* tour as a case study for the *Bureau* as it echoes conditions similar to those of the Port — plus there is extensive documentation of this particular tour, with an elaborate text accompanied by photographs. In 2004, the *Center* hosted an exhibition and program called *Diversions and Dislocations: California's Owens Valley.*[651] Architectural historian and frequent *CLUI* contributor Kazys Varnelis describes the Valley as a site where "water, power, and recreational tourism intersect with a landscape, at once beautiful and toxic, natural and reshaped by man."[652] The *Center* rented a luxury bus, loaded it with paying participants, and traversed for two full days across various terrain, starting from the *CLUI's* headquarters in Culver City, and passing through a variety of sites to explore the industrial, utopian, and ruined "backspace" of California, before finally reaching the outer edges of the Owens Lake reservoir [Fig.70].

The accompanying photographs of this tour produce convincing evidence of the role of the bus itself, and how particular vehicular features influence the experience of the trip. The headlining photograph of the report features a tour guide silhouetted against the bus's front windscreen, holding a microphone up to speak. Within the window frame, the glass is tinted a sepia-like tone, colouring both the unfolding desert road that lies outside and its perception. The window is a medium, acting as a frame through which to gaze upon the various infrastructures on display, equipped with just enough tint to dramatize the view an extra little bit [Fig.71].[653] In another photograph, the bus is pictured from outside, penetrating the frame from the left side, with a gaggle of what presumably are participants wandering about an unspecified point of interest. But right in the middle of the photograph sits a giant radar dish. In the foreground, a small sign labelled EARTH offers a tantalizing clue as to where

644 Thompson, "In Two Directions," 20.

645 Matthew Coolidge, "The Bus Tour as Inverted Vitrine: Engaging with the Material Culture of the Museum of the American Land," in *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism*, ed. Nato Thompson (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House; New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), 43.

646 Coolidge, "The Bus Tour," 43.

647 Coolidge, "The Bus Tour," 43.

648 Coolidge, *Overlook*, 27.

649 Coolidge, "The Bus Tour," 44.

650 Coolidge, "The Bus Tour," 43.

651 "Diversions and Dislocations," *The Lay of the Land: The Center for Land Use Interpretation Newsletter*, no. 27 (Summer 2004).

652 Center for Land Use Interpretation, *Points of Interest in the Owens River Valley*, introduction by Kazys Varnelis (Los Angeles: Center for Land Use Interpretation, 2004).

653 Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic," 4.

[Fig.69]

[Fig.70]

[Fig.71]

we are [Fig.72]. What we have is an interpretive machine: the bus is just one part, equal to the sign, the radar dish, the distant mountains, and the participants. The photograph exposes the multiple interpretive instruments and layers that go into perception of the landscape. "The perception of place," Coolidge writes, "is affected by each of the mediating agents it passes through, from the inert material of the ground to the final frame of the beholder."[654]

The *CLUI's* tours fuse physical landscapes with the analytical depth that is a hallmark of geographic fieldwork, coating an informational tone with a congenial manner, finely laced with dry humour.[655] For example, in recounting the second day of the tour in their newsletter, the *CLUI* writes:

> Outside, huge radio dishes with distinct functions loom enigmatically, pointed towards distant points unknown. Eventually we disembark and wander around this unpeopled place, among these potent emblems of the mysteries of the universe. Then, from nowhere, someone appears and asked the ultimate, universal question: why were we here? To learn about this place, of course, was the unsaid response.[656]

This passage reveals that even though tours are heavily scripted and planned, spontaneity is necessary in a landscape that is neither purely cultural nor natural.

6.8 "THE ADMINISTRATIVE SUBLIME"

A study of the *Center for Land Use Interpretation* would not be complete without considering how, through their varied discursive projects, they employ a style reminiscent of a government agency, reproducing standardized bureaucratic or administrative language. Their sparse and straightforward materials, such as the aforementioned *Centers of the USA* exhibition, verges on ironic detachment but never quite succumbs. What they present is a display of non-partisanship, a public-facing commitment to interpreting the ongoing transformation of land under modern industrial advancement.[657] The *CLUI's* near-imitation of institutional language in their ventures maintains humour without reducing the complexity of what they are presenting. Take, for example, some of their entries in the Land Use Database. They are clearly taking cues from roadside signs that can be found at popular tourist destinations. Extended captions provide a terse yet expository explanation of what it is we are looking at. While straightforward and presented in clear language, there is a drip of humour that finds itself present, yet without accolade nor disenchantment. For example, an entry for New Hampshire's famous Indian Head:

654 Coolidge, *Overlook*, 32.

655 Sarah Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips: Tourism and Land-Based Practice," in *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, eds. Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 48.

656 "Diversions and Dislocations," *The Lay of the Land: The Center for Land Use Interpretation Newsletter*, no. 27 (Summer 2004).

657 Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic," 3.

[Fig.72]

> Indian Head is a geographic feature that, to some, resembles an Indian's head. It has been recognized and featured as such since the early 1800s and is one of two "anthropogeomorphological attractions" in the heavily touristed Franconia Notch region of the White Mountains, home of the more famous Old Man of the Mountains (which collapsed in 2003).[658]

The text is pretty direct, presuming institutional detachment. Yet, there is a liveliness and humour tinged with oddball asides and facts that transcend the usually banal and administrative sapping of curiosity, transformed into queries to know more. Using such a voice allows other, alternative issues to sit alongside the mundane and factual. Such tactics might not align with the values of traditional museum bureaucracy, but the *CLUI* manages to echo the resolve of the public institution for their own conceptual benefit. American curator and filmmaker Kate Haug says that this cloaking of institutional norms is "a striking metaphor for [the] *CLUI*: it at once camouflages itself in the prevailing cultural aesthetic while forcing the function of those forms to the surface."[659] By re-appropriating the voice of the institution rather than the political activist, the *Center* accomplishes its proclaimed desire to engage in multiple conversations rather than one. As Coolidge has pointed out, "whether online, in the gallery, or out in the desert, if the viewer wants politics, it's going to be their own, not the *Center's*, that they find."[660]

What unites this persistent production of an astounding amount of exhibitions, tours, displays, programs, publishing, and even souvenirs, is an almost crazed drive by the *CLUI* to seek out the boundaries of the United States in *all* of its billions and billions of artifacts, however futile it may be.[661] There is a limitless quest — much like artist Ed Ruscha's obsessive documentation of all the buildings on the Sunset Strip — to catalogue a perpetually unfolding topography even though we know it's infinite. Humans have always had a desire to catalogue and document the entirety of humanity; this is not new. It is, of course, completely futile. American art critic Michael Ned Holte says that for a group like the *CLUI*, such futility is "at least half the thrill (yes, *thrill*) of constructing 'discursive and institutional limitations,' and 'self-imposed restrictions' was (or is) the *failure* to stay within such circumscribed boundaries."[662] This is also part of Holte's "administrative sublime."[663]

A parallel is noted between the *Center's* approach and their (tentative) intersection with conceptual art via the so-called "aesthetics of administration" proposed by the German art historian Benjamin Buchloh. In his essay "Conceptual Art, circa 1962—1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," Buchloh postulates that the rise of 1960s conceptual art carried a symbiotic relationship with administrative aesthetics. His observation was that many conceptual artists adopted such bureaucratic and administrative forms as a simultaneous critique of institutional structures and a radical severance from inherited art historical legacies and traditions.[664] Yet the *CLUI* remains distant to these tendencies, as they are not beholden to any particular bureaucratizing constraints of the art world, as they purposefully configure themselves as a liminal practice that abdicates disciplinary

658 "Indian Head Resort, New Hampshire," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 21, 2024, https://clui.org/ludb/site/indian-head-resort.

659 Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic," 4.

660 Haug, "The Human/Land Dialectic," 5.

661 Cultural Landscape Foundation, "It Takes One."

662 Holte, "The Administrative Sublime," 25-26. Emphasis in the original.

663 Holte, "The Administrative Sublime," 24.

664 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter, 1990): 105-143.

limits in favour of overlap and slippages. Dwelling on the margins is permission to continually "code-switch" between interpretive frameworks.[665] Their approach does not reduce land to a symbolic gesture or present it as an act of expression, but rather emphasizes landscape in its complex and raw form. The *Center* guides individuals towards prospective areas of interest, prompting firsthand exploration and comprehension. Theirs is a call to action: to personally experience these sites rather than passively consuming secondhand summaries.

The *Center* opens portals into other artistic practices, specifically ones that court overlapping expertise and knowledge. The *CLUI* offers a knowing wink towards conceptual and land art practices stemming from the 1960s forward. They have never been shy about acknowledging their influences; Robert Smithson does not float within their orbit for nothing.[666] However, I do not want to stress too much on the inheritances that conceptual or land art may have had on the outlook of the *CLUI*. The primary takeaway from spending so much time with them now is to reveal the inspiration for the *Bureau*. They remain mostly on the fringes of artistic practice, preferring to "[eschew] the tautological definitions of art-for-art's-sake that are endemic to Conceptual practice, in favor of administration-for-administration's sake: that is, administration taken to the boundaries of experience."[667] This is what allows the *CLUI* to constantly explore and interpret the landscape, navigating fringes in search of other insight. What is evident is that they serve as a perpetually shifting archive and constantly respond to the ever-changing (American) landscape, while also holding a mirror up so that we may see ourselves as reflections of land and how we use it. But while a mirror presumes a single point of view, the *CLUI's* methods challenge this individual view, opting out of the prescriptive in favour of observational confusion (there's always going to be more than one way to experience and view a site). Their mirror is a funhouse mirror, reflective of life's many faces. The *CLUI's* effort is a partially sober documentation of the environment and what has been referred to as a slyly humorous conceptual art project.[668] The *CLUI* constructs multiple portraits of America's built environment as something that is at once inscrutable, comic, and profound.

The *CLUI's* legacy isn't just the information they provide, or any of the interpretive gestures they create, nor the various perspectives they challenge. Instead, the *Center* is — to use their own words — an "unusual and exemplary" model for the *Bureau*. To me, this is their most significant project — creating a feasible model (and permission) to practice art on the margins, where interpretation encourages not a singular but an open-ended, plural conception of landscape. As Matthew Coolidge has said, to truly appreciate something you need to "get off your ass and do it yourself."[669] This is a nod to the immersive nature of their work, where the value of personal experience over distant observation draws us closer to ourselves. We are all observers and participants in the landscape, they seem to say — and they provide ways for a public to engage. In many ways, the *Center* embodies the democratic ideals that Buchloh suggested conceptual art could, at its very best, aspire to — free of institutional constraints and encouraging open discourse that accumulates as a collective vision on, and of, the world.

665 Claire Light, "CLUI," *Atlas(t)*, March 2006, accessed March 18, 2024, https://clairelight.typepad.com/at-last/2006/03/clui.html.

666 For example, Smithson appears eight times in the Land Use Database, while Land Art appears sixteen. See: "Search Results for Robert Smithson," *The Center for Land Use Interpretation*, accessed February 21, 2024, https://clui.org/ludb/search?-search_api_fulltext=Robert+smithson.

667 Holte, "The Administrative Sublime," 26.

668 Mason Currey, "This Land Is Your Land," *Metropolis*, September 1, 2006.

669 Doug Harvey, "Wading in the Waste Stream with the Center for Land Use Interpretation," *LA Weekly*, August 27, 2008.

6.9 THE LOS ANGELES URBAN RANGERS: UNCOMMON NATURE

Not far from the Culver City headquarters of the *Center for Land Use Interpretation*, a different sort of land-centric quasi-agency also appropriates the aesthetics of administration to translate complex issues of nature–society in order to "model a form of spatialized civic education."[670] These are the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers* (*LAUR, The Rangers,* or *Urban Rangers* for short), and their spatial territory is not necessarily the urban conglomeration of the city itself, but rather, its geologic foundation: the L.A. Basin. Their work is not so much about urban space as it is about reforming a relationship to nature in light of urban expansion and development.[671] The mission of the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers* follows a similar agenda to that of the *Center for Land Use Interpretation*, aligning under the primary goal of assisting citizens to relate to their environment, be it the localized L.A. Basin or the continental United States, through various acts of interpretation. Founded in 2004, the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers* is a multidisciplinary collective featuring a rotating cast of expertise in architecture, art, geography, urban planning, cartography, and environmental history aiming, "with both wit and a healthy dose of sincerity, to facilitate creative, critical, head-on, oblique, and criss-crossed investigations into our sprawling metropolis."[672] The *Rangers* emphasize place-based encounters across the everyday landscapes of Los Angeles, holding campfire talks in empty downtown parking lots, hikes along the iconic Hollywood Boulevard, and ramblings amidst freeway interchanges.[673] Their logo, just like the *CLUI's*, is circular, except with a little bit more California pizazz [Fig.73]. Soft creamy hues of pink and powder blue and a stylized palm tree with a splash of green frond stands athwart a probably even more iconic L.A.-marker: the cloverleaf of an interstate highway interchange.

Most importantly to my research, the *LAUR* adopts and transforms the persona of the iconic United States's National Parks Service ranger, removing them from their natural habitat in the wilderness and placing them in an urban environment. Here they lead activities expected of any good park ranger, such as the aforementioned campfire talks and hikes, and carry with them the tools of the trade like maps, field kits, and other low-key devices.[674] All of this to spark creative engagement and reverence for not, in their case, nature, but instead for a way to (re)interpret the city's everyday environs, hopefully according Los Angeles the same amount of awe and wonder that a national park often receives.[675] In this section, I specifically focus on the *LAUR's* appropriation of the park ranger persona [Fig.74]. While the *Bureau* itself does not literalize such a character, I do, however, see my role — and the role of anyone associated with the *Bureau* — as a symbolic guide that blends authority with creativity to engage the public in novel ways. What the *LAUR's* park ranger demonstrates to me is how to connect with a public to promote appreciation for mundane, overlooked space by presenting the logistical landscape in an accessible and thought-provoking manner. For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on how a quasi-institution can utilize supposedly official tactics to create a flexible and compelling narrative tool to transform perception of the landscape.

670 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 56.

671 "Introduction," *Los Angeles Urban Rangers*, accessed February 22, 2024, http://www.laurbanrangers.org/site/introduction.

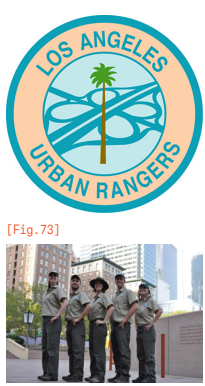
672 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 56.

673 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 56.

674 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," 56.

675 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," 56.

[Fig.73]



[Fig.74]

6.10 PARK RANGER AT YOUR SERVICE

Appropriating the ranger persona helps the *LAUR* ignite other kinds of reverential relationships outside of what is traditionally considered nature and bring these insights into contact with daily surroundings. The *Rangers* challenge the misconception that nature is pure and cities are fallen, instead proposing a redefined relationship to how we view, and live within, urban space.[676] In American mythology, the park ranger is a disarming entity that is familiar and non-threatening, arriving with a wealth of built-in goodwill; they immediately inspire trust and fair-mindedness towards a possibly skeptical public.[677]

But first, it is important to take a step back and understand who the park ranger is in order to see how the *LAUR* adapt this persona to suit their needs. While many nations have similar job profiles, I stick to the American definition of a park ranger as this is the archetype the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers* adapt. The National Parks Service (NPS) — which I briefly introduced in the latter parts of Chapter 3 — is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior, sitting alongside three other bureaus. Part of the NPS's remit is to manage and preserve national parks, monuments, and other protected areas. Their mission states that they are to "preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations."[678] Right off, the implication is that a ranger serves to protect, preserve, and, importantly, interpret the land, stating that they "safeguard these special places and share their stories with more than 318 million visitors every year."[679] According to an online job profile, a good park ranger needs to be "a personable and well-informed ambassador."[680] A ranger, then, is practical, hands-on, friendly, and exudes confidence (but not arrogance). Looking at photographs from the NPS website, the ranger is often shown pointing at maps, helping what one can presume to be lost hikers, attending to flora and fauna of a park, or engaging in some kind of low-level (benign) enforcement [Fig.75]. For the public (certainly an American public), the ranger is an archetypal figure that sits pleasantly in the collective imagination. They are reliable, trustworthy, friendly, and capable, probably one of the last remaining figures of authority that an (American) public might find palatable.[681]

What sets the *LAUR's* ranger apart from the official version is their transposition of the archetypal figure from the pristine wilderness into the urban context of concrete and asphalt; a most unexpected place for a ranger to inhabit. The *LAUR*'s commitment to the ranger persona extends to their attire, replete with neatly pressed khaki uniforms and their version of the iconic Stetson wide-brimmed hat, most notably found on the head of the Parks Service's famous avatar Smokey the Bear, affixed with a customized *Los Angeles Urban Rangers* logo. This visual identity complements their use of "democratic" and straightforward language, reinforcing a sincere interpretation of the park ranger.[682] The *Urban Ranger* is far from ironic; they slip on the uniform in earnest, as co-founder Emily Eliza Scott remarks, to "interrupt space, [and] to remake it in a radically different vision of normativity."[683] This is not a per-

[Fig.75]

676 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 403.

677 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 402.

678 "About Us," National Park Service, accessed February 21, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm.

679 "About Us," National Park Service.

680 There are other duties as well, such as law enforcement, emergency response, public education, resource management, and scientific research. See: U.S. Department of the Interior, accessed February 21, 2024.

681 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 403.

682 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 56.

683 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 403.

formance of a temporary character but a method to spark curiosity about everyday urban spaces often overlooked. Capitalizing on the ranger's almost mythological status in the American imagination, the newly formed *urban* ranger extends the sense of wonder commonly associated with visits to iconic natural sites like Yellowstone into the city of Los Angeles, challenging the dichotomy between the so-called natural and the urban. The *LAUR* ranger offers encouragement to "start looking at the city with fresh eyes – with the same level of awe and curiosity that visitors often bring to national parks."[684] While this stance could easily and satisfactorily stop at awe, the *Urban Rangers* provoke critical engagement with everyday surroundings, equipping the urban citizen with enough appropriate interpretative skills to better navigate their world [Fig.76].

A potential downside of this persona, the *LAUR* have remarked, is that at times they are considered representative of an official position (when in fact they are anything but), prompting a reconsideration of their art practice in relation to activism.[685] The impulse of their ranger is to spur creative interventions into the conditions of the urban landscape by proxy; if a ranger can guide me out of a forest, than why not in this urban agglomeration, too? Similar to the *CLUI*, this cloak of neutrality allows them to mingle between the various actors of any given project, no matter how receptive — or hostile — it may be. The ranger, because of their very neutrality, "[encourages] others to actively engage and (re)-imagine the world around them."[686] What the *LAUR* have learned is that a persona can at once disarm audiences while stimulating significant exchange about complicated and controversial spatial issues; however, this presumption is based in their very neutrality.[687] By maintaining such a stance, the *LAUR* invite all actors into the potential remaking of urban space.

For the *LAUR*, the ranger persona serves as a powerful tool to endorse a notion of care for the urban environment, akin to the care traditionally reserved for Nature's landscapes.[688] They prompt me to see the Port of Rotterdam in all of its complexity, especially as such a landscape remains severed from public consideration. The ranger persona suggests a method of engagement with complex landscape configurations. The *LAUR*'s ranger acts as a "categorical disruption" leveraging the mythological status of such a persona to inspire multiple perspectives, in their case, on the city of Los Angeles — for me, of the logistical landscape.[689] Writing about their practice, the *LAUR* have said that "The ranger persona transports through space an affect that has habitually been only incited in places that offer scenic overlooks, wayside photo points, outdoor recreation, or encounters with non-human life." They refer to this as a "spatial relocation of affect," which is enacted subtly (not explicitly) through the performance of "ranger-ness," instigating public contemplation — and action.[690] As a carefully crafted (and evolving persona) that is far from superficial, the urban ranger relocates a traditionally natural affect of care into an urban context, mediating a platform of goodwill and a catalyst for reimagining new relationships with the city. In other words, this persona provokes moral questions. What the *LAUR* reveal to me is the question: what happens when moral weight is transposed from its natural home — wilderness, sublime scenes — and instead brought forth into the urban environment, one that is typically viewed as less worthy of such consideration?[691] This is what I intend to find out.

684 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 403.

685 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 57.

686 Scott, "Undisciplined Geography," in *Geohumanities*, 57.

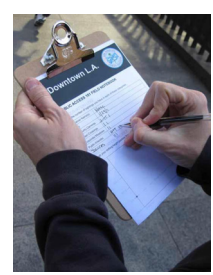
687 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 403.

688 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 403.

689 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 403.

690 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 403.

691 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 403.



[Fig.76]

6.11 CONCLUSION

692 William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Re-thinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

The Los Angeles Urban Rangers and the Center for Land Use Interpretation invoke a compelling relationship for the Bureau. All three entities are engaged in a spatial re-contextualization that collapses the conventional hierarchies of value between the natural and human-made or industrial (and logistical). The Rangers and the CLUI invite me to re-consider the Port with the same moral and perceptual weight we bring to natural landscapes. The Urban Rangers, by shifting the ranger persona onto a city commonly noted as having zero redeeming qualities, prompt a re-evaluation of space deemed unworthy of such moral rectitude. However, the point is not that the Rangers nor the CLUI impart par-ticular emphasis on the city of Los Angeles or even towards an entire continent because of their supposedly execrable qualities, but that our daily environments, and certainly urban environs, are frequently overlooked and dismissed, deemed unworthy of praise, just like logistical landscapes. That is, they are considered outside of nature. The LAUR and the CLUI each prompt the Bureau in their own individual way to reckon with American environmental historian William Cronon's thought that our relationship with nature is culturally constructed, more a reflection of our own cul-tural desires rather than a reflection of nature as an absence of human influence. He invites recognition of all land-scapes, regardless of their junky or disregarded status, urging a severance of the nature–culture dichotomy. [692] By taking an in-depth survey of the CLUI and their various diffusion methods and the LAUR's adoption of the park ranger persona, the Bureau "learns from" each to re-evaluate the surroundings of our everyday, collapsing the binary between nature and culture to make them accessible and a part of the ordinary.

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated the validity and necessity of finding innovative ways to re-evaluate and re-interpret logistical space, transforming their perception into sites of — and for — public reflection and engagement. Moving forward into the final Bureau Mission, these lessons guide the Bureau's own interpretive interventions: a set of "overlooks" and a site-based tour. These interpretive interventions are designed to contest the official narrative established by the Port Authority, encouraging geographic awareness that ultimately leads to direct contact with the landscape as a method of invoking legibility and ensuring a reciprocal relationship between society and the landscape.

BUREAU MISSION THREE:

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TO PARK
MAAS-
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693 Screens, fences, block posts, checkpoints, surveillance cameras, customs officers, ditches, artificial dunes, key cards, traffic patterns, warning signs, patrol barriers, motion detectors, floodlights, biometric scanners, bollards, and also climate, wind patterns, ecological zones, precipitation, and seasonal change are all various veiling agents in the Port.

694 Emily Eliza Scott, "Field Effects: 'Invisible-5's' Illumination of Peripheral Geographies," *Art Journal* 69, no. 4 (2010): 47.

695 Sarah Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips: Tourism and Land-Based Practice," in *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, eds. Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten Swenson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 51.

INTRODUCTION

I now alight at the final destination of this research. In some ways, Bureau Mission Three is a mirror image of where I started, lost in the force field of bureaucratic vision, reduced to replicating the official narrative as established by the Port Authority and the conventions of landscape photography. However, while Bureau Mission One set the stage for where this research occurs and why it is necessary, here in Bureau Mission Three, I focus on how I might actually intervene into the logistical landscape, deploying a set of tools that call for engagement, contact, and participation on behalf of a public that ordinarily would passively observe the Port, transfixed by its spectacular image. Bureau Mission Three intervenes into this rigid space and re-contextualizes the Port as a site of contest — contradictory, celebratory, or otherwise; it is not up to the *Bureau* to determine which. My aim is to reveal via these interventions is to reimagine what a port can be by paying attention to how a citizen can come into contact with it, thus allowing their voice to collaborate in its reconfiguration. I put into practice what the previous chapters have all built towards, which is my desire to make legible the complicated operations of the Port of Rotterdam through a redefined photographic practice, one that transcends its own limitations of sight to build out a system that creates a comprehensive, multi-sensory experience that initiates a broader socio-economic impact around how logistical landscapes can be perceived and experienced.

As I have argued, a logistical landscape is at once spectacular and visible yet remains hidden and discreet, its accessibility sealed off from public view by distance and a phalanx of veils.[693] These are inchoate landscapes, elusive to comprehension and legibility. It is in this murky haze that the *Bureau* intervenes. By focusing on the topographical realities and cultural formations of the Port of Rotterdam, the *Bureau's* mission is to encourage geographic awareness of this site by initiating embodied and experiential actions that deliberately bump up against, and collaborate with, "the protruding artifacts of the present."[694] I frame this as an intervention, a way of rendering tangible the extraordinary conditions that structure such environments, conditions that are often discounted as marginal at best and expendable at worst. Despite the Port Authority's best efforts to remain inchoate, intervening into the official narrative can challenge state-sanctioned experiences and send new (and contradictory) signals into the void of logistics.[695]

In the following sections, I introduce and examine two of the *Bureau's* interpretive interventions, beginning with the appropriation of two parking lots that are transformed into what I designate as Park Maasvlakte, where these interventions are settled. These two lots, typically reserved for the mundane activity of parking and usually considered nothing more than asphalt carpets, become templates for how reclaimed space can invite and encourage the public to confront the Port's operational realities lying only a few hundred meters distant. This newfound park, carved out of an over-

looked site, hosts a series of what I term "overlooks" — interpretive signs that mimic classic tourist destination signage, designed to propose new ways of (logistically) seeing and experiencing the Port in direct contest to the official narrative. I review these shortly. I use a theoretical perspective on tourism to position the *Bureau's* own excursions into infrastructural tourism within a global context of critical land-based practices. Expanding on the site-based tour, I reflect on the transformative potential of a redefined photographic practice encapsulated in the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes* that encourages the public to forge their own connections to the site, underscoring the complex logistical interplay between physical space and the socio-economic landscape.[696]

696 Scott, "Field Effects," 46.

697 Marinke Steenhuis, "Estimated Time of Arrival: Port Development 1940 to Present," in *The Port of Rotterdam: World Between City and Sea*, eds. Adriaan Geuze et al. (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2016), 191.

NOT JUST A PARKING LOT

On Maasvlakte's outer rim there are a series of parking lots, numbered 1–6, that could double as vantage points to gaze upon the Port, but rarely they do. These lots primarily facilitate recreation and leisure activities like dog walking and kitesurfing. Visual engagement with the Port is usually not more than an incidental glance, an experience secondary to the North Sea that lies beyond the artificial dune, and one which is only accessible via parking lots 1–6. One can also walk or bike along the roadside, but more than likely a fast-moving transport truck laden with hidden goods would strike you. Public access here, while celebrated and reasonably developed, is more like a form of camouflage perpetuated by the Port Authority. For example, most public space in Maasvlakte has a hidden logistical or engineering purpose, disguised as recreational yet created to sustain or protect circulatory capital. Beereiland (Bear Island) is simultaneously a tiny redoubt housing the occasional plump seal in the heart of the container terminal and a shock absorber to cushion the quayside from any potential blow lest a rogue tanker laden with liquified natural gas run astray; meanwhile, the Slufter is a waterfowl breeding ground and also a repository for the toxic silt dredged from the seabed to ensure the ships keep flowing.[697] Other than the Balkon van Europa, located at Maasvlakte's most northern tip, there is nowhere to even get a snack nor toilet. "No Entry" and a surplus of other signage and security measures limit access. All that is left for any citizen who dares to not park their car is to capitulate and park their car.

One day, I decided to watch the comings-and-goings of various visitors to the Port. I, too, parked my car, and sat on a dune to observe. Vital to know is that most vehicles park perpendicular to the port operations: the car's front-end points towards the North Sea, while its tail faces the Port. Immediately, your back is turned to port operations in disengagement. Once parked, you traverse and slice through the manufactured dune that rises up nearly four-stories at its highest peak. Reaching the beach-side, line of sight with the Port is broken, only to be re-engaged as a series of glimpses through your windscreen while exiting Maasvlakte.

698 Scott, "Field Effects," 39.

699 Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 50.

700 Nicholas Bauch and Emily Eliza Scott, "The Los Angeles Urban Rangers: Actualizing Geographic Thought," *Cultural Geographies* 19, no. 3 (2012): 405.

701 "FutureLand | Experience Port of Rotterdam," Port of Rotterdam, accessed March 4, 2024, https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/to-do-port/futureland.

702 Erasmus University Rotterdam, "Impact of Mainport Rotterdam on the Dutch Economy," Erasmus Centre for Urban, Port and Transport Economics (Erasmus UPT), 2018.

I spent so much time in these lots and began to conceive of them as sites of potential, rather than just dead repositories for parking. Could these locations — normally ill-considered — be spaces to host a different form of activity for Port visitors other than serving as a reservoir to sop up automotive oil leaks or as places to dump refuse? What would happen if the Bureau intervened into such space and initiated a shadow park by piggybacking on the Port Authority's existing infrastructure? Could these parking lots, reconfigured into nascent national parks, eclipse a passive and singular gaze and encourage other ways to experience the Port?

Welcome to Park Maasvlakte: named after its location and retaining the visual characteristics of a parking lot, yet inheriting the values of the prototypical national park, normally designed to serve tourism through various interpretive gestures. Park Massvlakte is comprised of two lots: P6, one of the six lots that ring Maasvlakte, and the gravel strip that houses various shipspotters, day tourists, and the Balkon van Europa, now appropriated for acts of experience and reordered as an eminent way to make legible the logistical landscape. The parking lots, now transformed, start with the purpose of and for sight but quickly extend beyond visibility because of their surprisingly sensual nature. Through a series of overlooks, the *Bureau* places a visitor within a particular location where the site's visual and sensorial cues create an effect that goes beyond just looking to fully experiencing.[698] Perched in these lots, the salted air whips your hair, the clang of steel on steel reverberates across the distance, and a faint aftertaste of diesel and flecks of rust create a composition of experience, where looking, as American artist and writer Sarah Kanouse states, is only ever in tandem with all the other actions of logistics.[699]

These transformed parking lots appropriate the Port's infrastructures — the lots themselves, roadways that permit accessibility, and the artificial dunes that create an amphitheatre of viewing — yet utilize this infrastructure for very different purposes. By reframing the Port's infrastructure, the official landscape with cultural, social, and historical significance casts the site in a novel and previously unconsidered light, which cultivates a lasting and meaningful relationship to logistics. This approach is not a critique but a method to reveal the influence that logistics plays in everyday life, which as I have argued, often remains hidden in plain sight.[700] Unlike the Port Authority's *FutureLand*, an interpretation centre that promotes the Port's activities with a booster-ish tone — "It's all possible in FutureLand!" [701] — the *Bureau* offers alternative narratives through its interventionary tactics.

PARK MAASVLAKTE: A NEW LOGISTICAL "PARK"

The *Bureau* focuses on two interpretive gestures: the overlook and the site-based tour. Each intervention will be explored in-depth later in this section. The overlooks and site-based tour appropriate existing infrastructure while slightly altering its original function. They aim to reinterpret official space

by encouraging new ways of seeing the already-established narratives set by *FutureLand* and the Port Authority. My aim is not to replicate a national park, but to create a park that is national, meaning a communal space that invites and encourages a multitude of citizens to participate in its making, and not an otherworldly spectre that is reduced to vision. Adding to this notion of national, the Port of Rotterdam is of high economic importance to the Dutch government; it is the tenth largest port in the world, and it is consistently framed with significant national import and value.[702] For example, the former mayor of Rotterdam, Ahmed Aboutaleb, said that the city of Rotterdam derives its identity from the Port. He goes on to state that this region, which also includes the Westland and the petroleum landscape around The Hague, generates fifteen percent of the total national Dutch income.[703] This is why I frame it as "national."

A precedent for the *Bureau's* Park Maasvlakte is the work of American landscape photographer Richard Misrach, who, like me as a landscape photographer, proposed to develop a national park out of a difficult site. Misrach's proposal followed his chronicling of the utter devastation of the Nevada desert after the US Navy rained down atomic ordnance over the course of decades. Misrach — "the polar opposite of a Sierra Club photographer" — catalogued atomic testing's legacy by documenting the target debris, shrapneled vehicles, and the ground surface ruined and scarred by warheads and explosions, all rendered in sublime detail in his publication *Bravo 20: The Bombing of the American West* [Fig. 77].[704] In the conclusion of his book, Misrach proposes "America's first environmental memorial: Bravo 20 National Park" [Fig.78].[705] Outlining his plan in detail, including various vistas and sketches from a landscape architect, Misrach's national park includes all the requisite interpretive functions, "complete with guided tours, campgrounds and picnic areas, and a visitors centre with a museum and a gift shop to sell souvenirs and maps to radioactive landfills."[706] Misrach's (failed) mission resonates as it revolves around the notion of a park that is transformative, "whose raison d'etre is not to lull but to provoke, stir up, awaken."[707] The Bravo 20 National Park reinterprets the role of military history embedded in the shaping of the North American landscape, while simultaneously challenging the idyllic conception of a national park as a bastion of wilderness propagated by someone like Ansel Adams. Misrach, like my practice, utilizes photography in an extra-photographic state, not only as a representational tool, but as a tactic for revealing hidden and obscured histories. Misrach's national park and the *Bureau's* park share a common vision, which is to expand obscured narratives that are deliberately kept from view and experience in order to open up new scenarios.

A national park is usually represented as a pristine sanctuary in the imagination, a vision of land that may not align completely with physical reality.[708] In contrast, the landscapes of Misrach's Bravo 20 park, a denuded and starved terrain rendered off-limits, and the *Bureau's* Park Maasvlakte, embedded in the logistical terrain of the Port of Rotterdam, are both perceived as mundane, unsightly, or simply forgotten. While the arrival of a colossal container ship might momentarily elevate the spectacular appeal of the Port, this is generally overshadowed by the banality of endless rows of anonymous

703 Ahmed Aboutaleb, "Foreword," in *The Port of Rotterdam: World Between City and Sea*, eds. Geuze et al. (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2016), 17.

704 The author must be referring to Ansel Adams, the Sierra Club photographer par excellence. He first become involved with the organization in 1927, and this involvement lasted until his death. See: Reg Saner, "Review: Bomb Love: And After?," review of *Bravo 20: The Bombing of the American West*, by Richard Misrach and Myriam Weisang Misrach, and *Nuclear Landscapes*, by Peter Goin, *The Georgia Review* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 146.

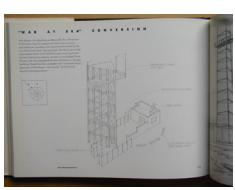
705 Richard Misrach and Myriam Weisang Misrach, *Bravo 20: The Bombing of the American West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

706 Henrik Gustafsson, "Foresight, Hindsight and State Secrecy in the American West: The Geopolitical Aesthetics of Trevor Paglen," *Journal of Visual Culture* 12, no. 1 (2013): 153.

707 Saner, "Review: Bomb Love," 146.

708 Thomas Patin, "Introduction: Naturalizing Rhetoric," in *Observation Points: The Visual Politics of National Parks*, ed. Thomas Patin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), ix-xxvi. See also: Rebecca Solnit, *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Landscape Wars of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[Fig.77]



[Fig.78]

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warehouses or stacks of shipping containers. Logistical landscapes resist interpretive and symbolic appreciation, a divergence from the national park's ethos of celebrating and replicating scenic beauty. Instead, logistical landscapes are rejected from visual scrutiny. The *Bureau's* newfound park, akin to Misrach's Bravo 20, departs from a romanticized national imagination and instead exist on the peripheral margins of both the national imagination and physical site. Tying this romantic notion of this national identity to a physical location, Rotterdam's ex-mayor said that seeing the Port from a helicopter, "reawakened the poet in me."[709]

By reconfiguring the expectations of a national park within the confines of a logistical landscape and dampening any proclivity for utopian ideals, the *Bureau* transforms the possibilities of both a park and its site, the Port. Overlooked space is opened to novel, previously unconsidered dimensions, infused with scenarios for multiple visions of the Port beyond its currently official state. This approach shifts the perception of the Port, much like how Yosemite National Park in the USA was reproduced into an iconic national landscape. However, there is difference: Park Maasvlakte is not transformed into a new frontier and rendered as "the official version of Nature," nor are there acts of nation-building to mythologize engineering triumphs, unlike *FutureLand's* vision of the Port;[710] rather, geography is activated to creatively reimagine the logistical landscape into a site of experience, elevating its status from banal and forgotten to at least considered and looked upon.[711] The *Bureau's* interpretive interventions within this newly formed park act as mediators on site-specific issues that relate to the daily lives of visitors, especially those from Rotterdam, where the city's identity is closely aligned with the Port. The founders of the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers* have discovered that "acting out the contestation of territory in situ [...], teaches people through direct corporeal experience about their city in a way that is impossible from reading alone."[712] They have learned that direct contact enables visitors to become more informed about their physical surroundings and even, potentially, enabling them to take action.[713]

OVERLOOKING OVERLOOKED SPACE

In National Parks Service (NPS) parlance, usage of the word overlook is in reference to "scenic views," locations which provide a visitor an uninterrupted, expansive view onto notable natural, cultural, or historical sites that might inspire awe alongside potential health and economic benefits.[714] These locations are usually chosen for their panoramic expansiveness and equipped with some kind of viewing infrastructure, such as a platform or signage with a helpful hint:

TAKE PHOTO HERE
POINT OF INTEREST
OBSERVATION POINT

709 Ahmed Aboutaleb, "Foreword," in *The Port of Rotterdam*, 17.

710 Solnit, *Savage Dreams*, 229.

711 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 407.

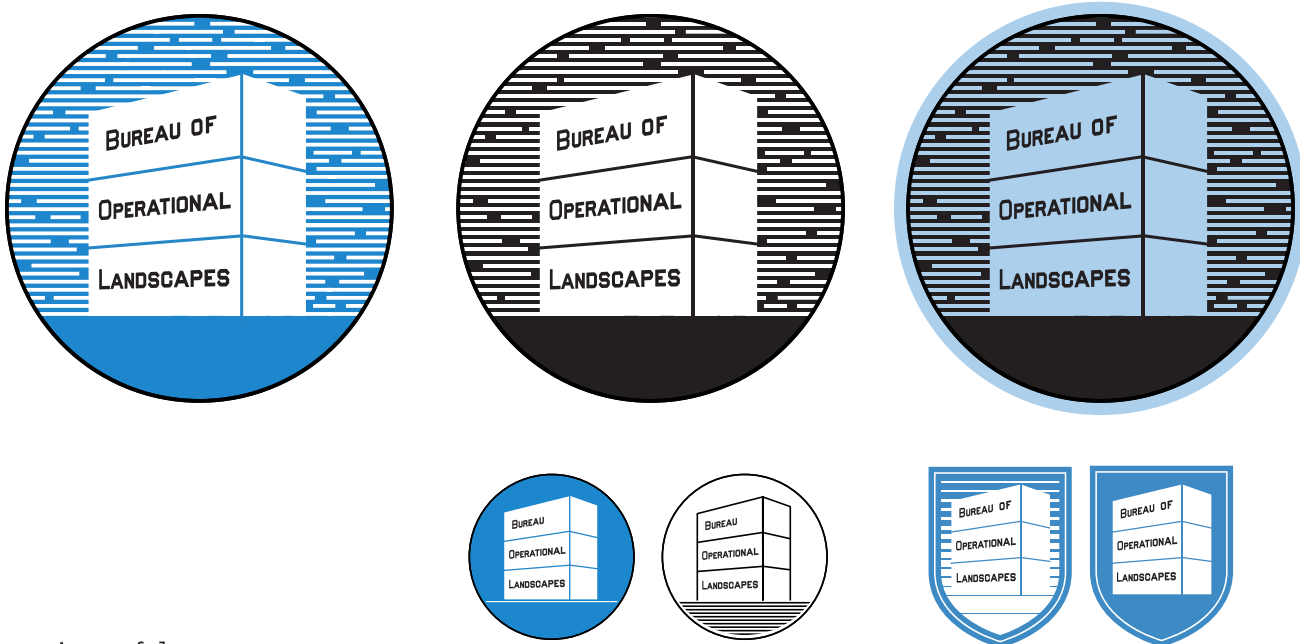
712 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 407.

713 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 407.

714 "Understanding Scenery," National Park Service, last modified February 26, 2021, accessed March 5, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/scenicviews/understanding-scenery.htm.

IDENTITY OVERVIEW

BUREAU OF OPERATIONAL LANDSCAPES



Different versions of logo
Bureau of Operational Landscapes

Park Maasvlakte Identity

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ABC Bliss-Bucket

ABC AmarilloUSAF

字母 Lanting Black-simple

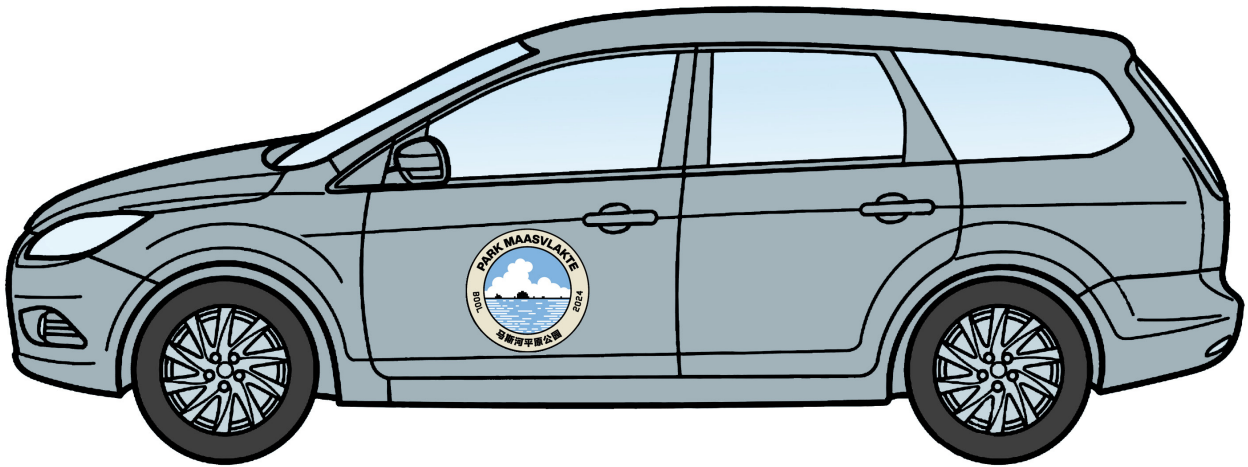
ABC Helvetica Now Var

ABC Times New Roman

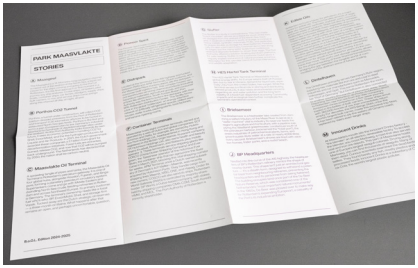
ABC Monospace Typewriter

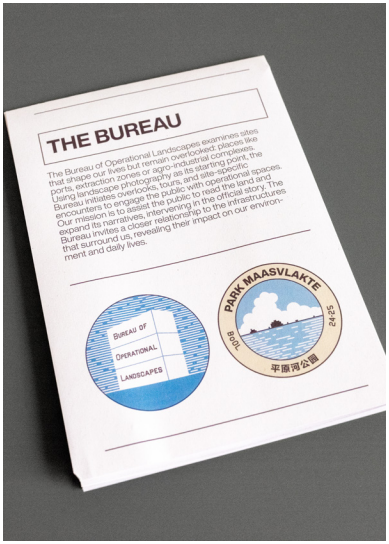
Typefaces and colour scheme

Uniform including Park Maasvlakte mission patch



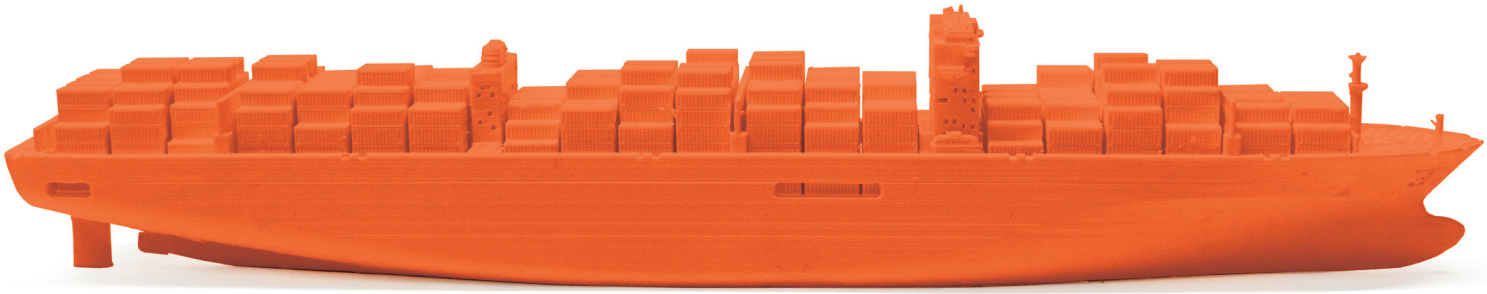
Opel Astra Sport Touring Wagon 1.4 Turbo
(grey, 101,433 kilometres on the odometer
at time of writing, give or take)





Suitcase containing tools and objects
Foldable map of Park Maasvlakte
features Overlooklocations and 13 mini-stories

Objects (carried in suitcase) from left to right:
20-foot Shipping Container; Chinese Lion;
Seagull; Ship Superstructure



Object:
Container Ship

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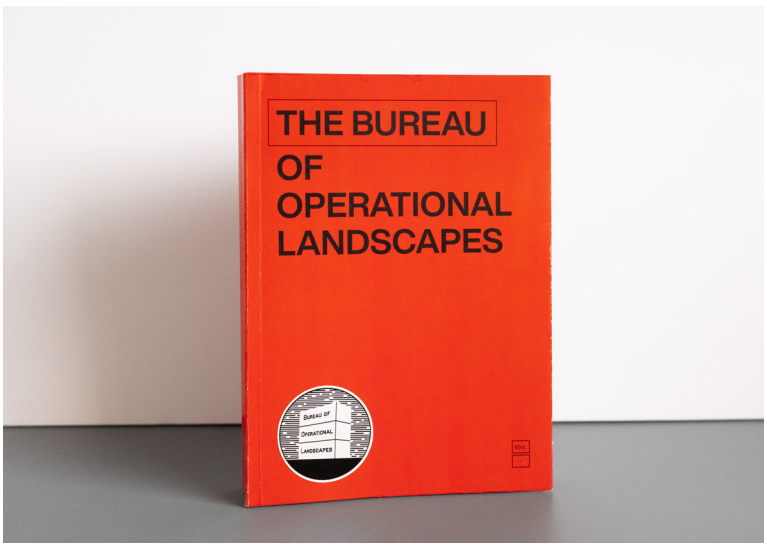

Book about the Bureau of Operational Landscapes

Book about the Bureau of Operational Landscapes

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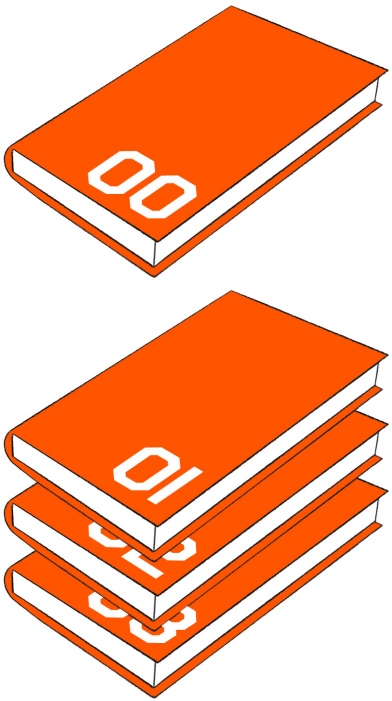
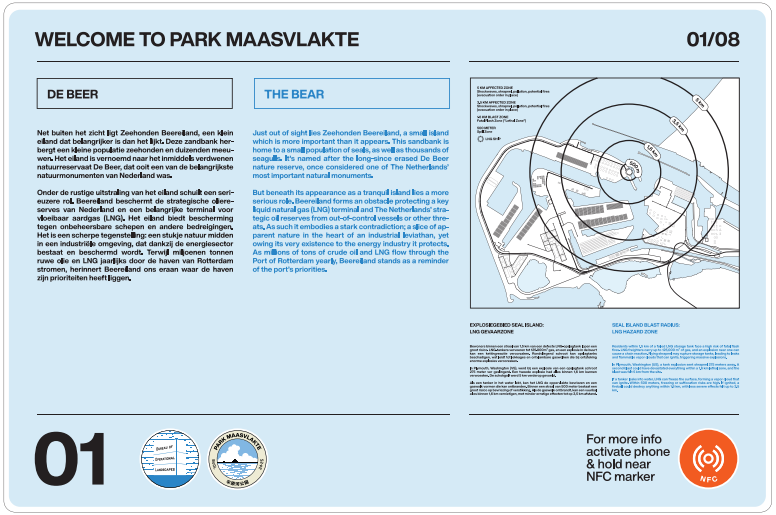


Typical map outlining Topographic
Photograph route
One booklet per route; 16 total



WELCOME TO PARK MAASVLAKTE

01/08

DE BEER

Net buiten het zicht ligt Zeehonden Beereiland, een klein eiland dat belangrijker is dan het lijkt. Deze zandbank herbergt een kleine populatie zeehonden en duizenden meeuwen. Het eiland is vernoemd naar het inmiddels verdwenen natuurreservaat De Beer, dat ooit een van de belangrijkste natuurmonumenten van Nederland was.

Onder de rustige uitstraling van het eiland schuilt een serieuzere rol. Beereiland beschermt de strategische oliereserves van Nederland en een belangrijke terminal voor vloeibaar aardgas (LNG). Het eiland biedt bescherming tegen onbehoorlijkere schepen en andere bedreigingen. Het is een scherpe tegenstelling: een stukje natuur midden in een industriële omgeving, dat dankzij de energiesector bestaat en beschermd wordt. Terwijl miljoenen tonnen ruwe olie en LNG jaarlijks door de haven van Rotterdam stromen, herinnert Beereiland ons eraan waar de haven zijn prioriteiten heeft liggen.

THE BEAR

Just out of sight lies Zeehonden Beereiland, a small island which is more important than it appears. This sandbank is home to a small population of seals, as well as thousands of seagulls. It's named after the long-since erased De Beer nature reserve, once considered one of The Netherlands' most important natural monuments.

But beneath its appearance as a tranquil island lies a more serious role. Beereiland forms an obstacle protecting a key liquid natural gas (LNG) terminal and The Netherlands' strategic oil reserves from out-of-control vessels or other threats. As such it embodies a stark contradiction: a piece of apparent nature in the heart of an industrial leviathan, yet owing its very existence to the energy industry it protects. As millions of tons of crude oil and LNG flow through the Port of Rotterdam yearly, Beereiland stands as a reminder of the port's priorities.

EXPLOSIEGEBIED SEAL ISLAND:
LNG GEVAARZONE

Beereiland bevat een aanzienlijke LNG-opslagcapaciteit. Binnen een straal van 1 kilometer vormen de dichtstbijzijnde gebouwen een ernstig gevaar voor de gezondheid. Binnen een straal van 1,5 kilometer bevinden zich belangrijke industriële installaties, waarbij het bijbehorende en ontgrondende gevaarlijke en bij ontploffing dodelijk is binnen 4,5 kilometer.

In Rotterdam, Vlaardingen, Delft, Leiden en de omgeving zijn een aanzienlijk aantal LNG-tanks aan gebouwen. Een tweede explosie kan alleen binnen 1 km zeer ernstig gevaar voor de gezondheid van de mensen veroorzaken.

Als een tanker in het zuiden, West, Noord of Oost ligt, zal de vaste tankinhoud van een gemeente binnen de kan ontwikkeling binnen minimaal een 200 meter bestaat een aanzienlijk gevaar voor de gezondheid van de mensen. Binnen een straal van 1 kilometer bevinden zich meerdere LNG-installaties, met vitale energie-infrastructuur. Een ontploffing van vitale energie-infrastructuur kan 1,5 km ontwikkeling.

SEAL ISLAND BLAST RADIUS:
LNG HAZARD ZONE

Accidents within 1.5 km of a Mark LNG storage tank have a high risk of fatal blast injuries. Within 1 km, most buildings will be at risk of fatal injuries, and accordingly to some extent also the surrounding area. Within 4.5 km, there is a significant risk of fatal injuries and thermally induced secondary fires (or spots, triggering evacuation explosions).

In Rotterdam, Vlaardingen, Delft, Leiden and the surrounding area, there are a significant number of LNG tanks in buildings. A second explosion can only cause very serious danger to the health of the people within 1 km.

If a tanker docks in the south, west, north, or east, the total tank capacity of a municipality within a 200 meter radius poses a significant danger to the health of people. Within a 1 km radius, there are several critical LNG-related infrastructures. A blast can cause an energy infrastructure disruption of up to 1.5 km.

01

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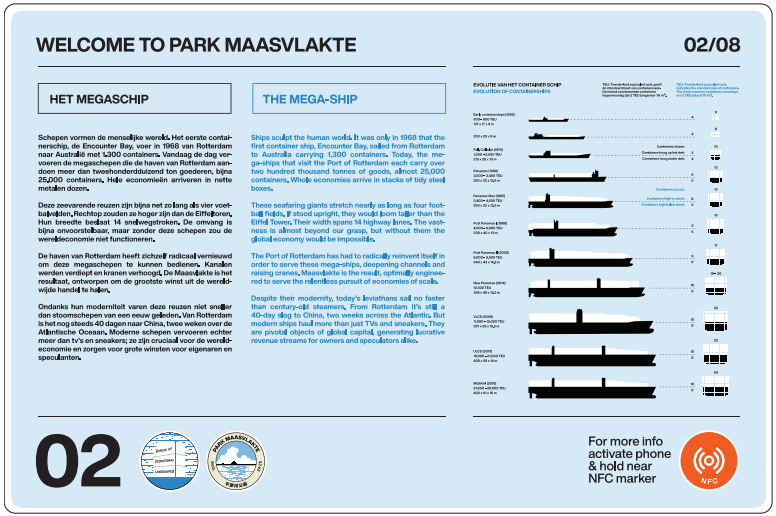

WELCOME TO PARK MAASVLAKTE

02/08

HET MEGASCHIP

Schepen vormen de menselijke wereld. Het eerste containerschip, de Encounter Bay, voer in 1968 van Rotterdam naar Australië met 1,300 containers. Vandaag de dag vervoeren de megaschepen die de haven van Rotterdam aandoen meer dan tweehonderdduizend ton goederen, bijna 25,000 containers. Hoe economieën arriveren in nette metalen dozen.

Deze zeevarende reuzen zijn bijna net zo lang als vier voetbalvelden. Rechtop zouden ze hoger zijn dan de Eiffeltoren. Hun breedte beslaat 14 snelwegstroken. De omvang is bijna onvoorstelbaar, maar zonder deze schepen zou de wereldeconomie niet functioneren.

De haven van Rotterdam heeft zichzelf radicaal vernieuwd om deze megaschepen te kunnen bedienen. Kanalen werden verdiept en kranen verhoogd. De Maasvlakte is het resultaat, ontworpen om de grootste winst uit de wereldwijde handel te halen.

Ondanks hun moderniteit varen deze reuzen niet sneller dan stoomschepen van een eeuw geleden. Van Rotterdam is het nog steeds 40 dagen naar China, twee weken over de Atlantische Oceaan. Moderne schepen vervoeren echter meer dan tv's en sneakers; ze zijn cruciaal voor de wereldeconomie en zorgen voor grote winsten voor eigenaren en speculanten.

THE MEGA-SHIP

Ships sculpt the human world. It was only in 1968 that the first container ship, Encounter Bay, sailed from Rotterdam to Australia carrying 1,300 containers. Today, the mega-ships that visit the Port of Rotterdam each carry over two hundred thousand tonnes of goods, almost 25,000 containers. Whole economies arrive in stacks of tidy steel boxes.

These seafaring giants stretch nearly as long as four football fields. If stood upright, they would loom taller than the Eiffel Tower. Their width spans 14 highway lanes. The vastness is almost beyond our grasp, but without them the global economy would be impossible.

The Port of Rotterdam has had to radically reinvent itself in order to serve these mega-ships, deepening channels and raising cranes. Maasvlakte is the result, optimally engineered to serve the relentless pursuit of economies of scale.

Despite their modernity, today's leviathans sail no faster than century-old steamers. From Rotterdam it's still a 40-day slog to China, two weeks across the Atlantic. But modern ships haul more than just TVs and sneakers. They are pivotal objects of global capital, generating lucrative revenue streams for owners and speculators alike.

02

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Outdoor Overlooks, including NFC chip
Tap your phone for extra information

#03 MIS

#03 MIS

WELCOME TO PARK MAASVLAKTE

03/08

MACHINES AAN HET ROER

Automatisering heeft de haven van Rotterdam omgevormd tot een enorme machine. Al in de jaren 60 adviseerden managementconsultants de havenautoriteiten om "dure arbeid te vervangen door goedkopere machines", wat leidde tot een drastische afname van de menselijke aanwezigheid. Zelfrijdende vrachtwagens en robotkranen nemen de plaats in van havenarbeiders, waardoor een nieuwe hiërarchie op de arbeidsmarkt ontstaat.

Containerisatie versnelde het proces en verminderde de vraag naar havenarbeiders en scheepsbemanningen. Nu houden bekwame kraanmachinisten toezicht op het laden van schepen vanuit verre controlekamers, terwijl vrachtwagenchauffeurs algoritmisch geoptimaliseerde routes volgen langs de havenwegen. "Bekketers", die zolt de ruggengraat van de haven vormden, zie je steeds minder vaak.

Automatisering verandert het maritieme landschap en vervaagt de grenzen tussen menselijke vaardigheden en machinale precisie. De haven is een monument voor efficiëntie en vooruitgang, maar elke verbetering brengt de activiteiten verder weg van de menselijke schaal.

MACHINES IN COMMAND

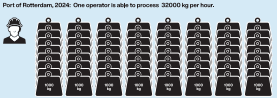
Automation has transformed the Port of Rotterdam into a vast machine. As early as the 1960s, port authorities were advised by management consultants to replace "expensive labour with cheaper capital equipment," leading to a drastic decrease in human presence at the port. Driverless trucks and robotic cranes take the place of dockworkers, creating a new hierarchy of labour.

Containerisation accelerated this process, slashing demand for dock workers and ship crews alike. Instead, skilled crane operators oversee the loading of ships from distant control rooms, while truck drivers follow algorithmically-optimised routes along port roads. Stevedores, once the hardworking backbone of the port, are an increasingly rare sight.

Automation reshapes the maritime landscape, blurring the lines between human skill and machine precision. The port has become a monument to efficiency and progress, but each improvement takes its operations further away from human scale.

Port of London, 1900: One strong dockworker is able to handle 150 kg per hour.

Port of Rotterdam, 2024: One operator is able to process 32000 kg per hour.



VAN MENS NAAR MACHINE:
DE TRANSFORMATIE VAN HAVENARBEID

In 1900 lagen schepen weken in de haven. In Londen waren dagelijks 10,000 dokwerkers nodig om de lading te verwerken, waarbij elke arbeider 100 tot 150 kg per uur handmatig verplaatste.

Tegenwoordig, in moderne haven zoals RWG in Rotterdam, heeft automatisering de productiviteit enorm verhoogd. Slechts 10 tot 15 operators zijn per dienst nodig om volledig geautomatiseerde kranen te bedienen, Elke operator kan tot vier kranen tegelijk bemoeien, en ze tot ve13,200 ton per uur verwerken.

De lading per schip is gestegen van 10,000 naar 240,000 ton, Automatisering heeft ook de arbeidsvraag met meer dan 50% verminderd, met kantoorruimtes en ondersteuning als gevolg. De uitdaging blijft een efficiënte en veiligheidsgericht in balans te houden naarmate technologie verder evolueert.

FROM MUSCLE TO MACHINE:
THE SHIFT IN PORT PRODUCTIVITY

In 1900, ships spent weeks in port. In London, 10,000 dockworkers managed the cargo flow, each handling 100 to 150 kg per hour using manual tools.

Today, at ports like Rotterdam's RWG terminal, automation has transformed productivity. Just 10 to 15 operators per shift manage fully automated cranes. One operator can oversee up to four cranes, processing up to 3,200 tons per hour per person.

Cargo per vessel has surged from 10,000 to 240,000 tonnes. Automation has cut labor by over 50%, causing job losses and requiring retraining, highlighting the challenge of balancing efficiency and jobs as technology advances.

03

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WELCOME TO PARK MAASVLAKTE

04/08

VRACHTCONTAINER: HET MAAKT NIET UIT WAT ER IN ZIT, ZOLANG HET MAAR DOORSTROOMT

Vrachtcontainers zijn eenvoudige metalen dozen. Saai en praktisch, met standaard lengtes van 20 en 40 voet lijken ze onopvallend. Maar deze metalen containers hebben de moderne wereld getransformeerd, en als je goed kijkt, zie je ze overal.

Oorspronkelijk gemaakt voor het Amerikaanse leger tijdens de Vietnamoorlog, schuilt de genialiteit van de container in zijn modulariteit. Eenmaal ingepakt, kunnen ze in de buiken van vrachtwagens, treinen en schepen worden geladen als stijve, verroeste bakstenen. Geen gedoe met in- en uitpakken, geen vertragingen, alleen nog maar doorlopende en soepele beweging.

Deze radicale eenvoud leidde tot een wereldwijde scheepsvaartboom. Er ontstonden uitgestrekte nieuwe havens — enorme machinelandschappen zoals hier op de Maasvlakte, die miljoenen van deze anonieme metalen dozen naadloos naar het volgende deel van hun reis konden verplaatsen door verschillende vervoerswijzen te combineren.

Schepen volgestapeld met duizenden containers verdienen de afstand tussen fabrieken en consumenten. Wat er in de dozen zit, doet er niet toe; het enige wat telt is dat het doorstroomt.

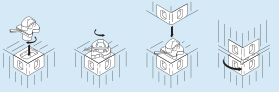
SHIPPING CONTAINER: IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT'S INSIDE AS LONG AS IT FLOWS

Shipping containers are simple steel boxes. Drab and utilitarian, their standardised 20- and 40-foot lengths seem unremarkable. But these metal containers have transformed the modern world, and once you start looking, they're everywhere.

Originally made for the US military during the Vietnam War, the container's genius is its modularity. Once packed, they can be loaded into the bellies of trucks, trains and ships like rigid, rusted bricks. No unpacking, no delays, just continuous, frictionless circulation.

This radical simplicity ushered in a global shipping boom. Sprawling new ports emerged — massive intermodal machine-scapes like here in Maasvlakte, capable of moving millions of these anonymous steel boxes seamlessly on to the next leg of their journey.

Ships stacked with thousands of containers collapse the distance between factories and consumers. What's inside the boxes doesn't matter; all that matter is that it flows.



EFFECTIEF

De zeecontainer heeft een mechanisme dat een interlock wordt genoemd. Dit wordt vaak gezien als een van de grootste uitvindingen van de 20e eeuw. Het zorgt ervoor dat containers gemakkelijk kunnen worden overgezet tussen schip, vrachtwagen en trein, Ze maakt het realisme intermodaal transport mogelijk.

EFFECTIVE

If the shipping container is considered one of the greatest inventions of the 20th century, then it is the interlock that grossest such status. This innovative simplifies the transfer of containers between ships, trucks, and trains, enabling seamless intermodal transport.

Projecten die gebruik maken van 10 Europese goederenvervoerkorridors van 2011 tot 2020 worden gesteund.
Projects utilising the 10 European freight corridors from 2011 to 2020 are supported.

De Europese Unie investeert 10 miljard euro van 2011 tot 2020 in cruciale projecten.
The European Union invests 10 billion euro between 2011 and 2020 in crucial projects.

INEFFECTIEF

Zeecontainers en pallets zijn niet goed compatibel, waardoor er vaak openingen ontstaan tussen de pallet en de containerwanden. Om de lading te beveiligen en verschuiving te voorkomen, worden opblaasbare zakken gebruikt om deze ruimtes op te vullen.

INEFFECTIVE

Sea containers and pallets aren't perfectly compatible, often leaving gaps between the pallet and container walls. To secure the load and prevent shifting during transport, inflatable bags are commonly used to fill these spaces.

04

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Outdoor Overlooks, including NFC chip
Tap your phone for extra information

WELCOME TO PARK MAASVLAKTE

05/08

DE ARBEID VAN EEN ZEEMAN: WERKRUIMTES

"Varen" is zwaar werk. Het combineert traditionele zeemansvaardigheden en fysieke uithoudingsvermogen met technologische kennis. De structuur van het schip weerspiegelt deze uiteenlopende rollen.

Onder de waterlijn: de machinekamer
Diep in een schip ligt de machinekamer, een onherbergzame plek waar automatisering samenkomt met zware handarbeid. Ondanks technologische vooruitgang blijven dit hete, benauwde, gevaarlijke en lawaaierige ruimtes. Zeelieden onderhouden er complexe machines met vakmanschap en handmatige precisie.

Het hoofddek: de strijd tegen de elementen
Op het hoofddek voeren zeelieden een voortdurende strijd tegen de natuurlijke elementen. Ze boenen, schuren en verven continu om elk oppervlak te beschermen. Zeelucht, zout en roest vormen een constante bedreiging. Ondanks hun inspanningen is het verval onvermijdelijk. De schepen zijn groot, de omstandigheden zwaar en het schoonmaken en opnieuw verven houdt nooit op.

De brug: een zee van administratie
Op de brug heeft fysieke arbeid plaatsgemaakt voor bureaucratie. Officieren raken bedolven onder papierwerk. Navigatiekaarten, veiligheidscertificeringen en communicatie van maritieme autoriteiten eisen hun aandacht. "Als een schip geen goede kopieermachine heeft," zegt een officier, "dan is het niet zeewaardig."

Naast administratie moeten zeelieden voortdurend schermen en navigatiehulpmiddelen volgen om een veilige doorgang te waarborgen. Lange diensten bestaan vaarsul uit het vastleggen van coördinaten en het pixel voor pixel berekenen van gevaren.

THE LABOUR OF A SAILOR: SPACES OF WORK

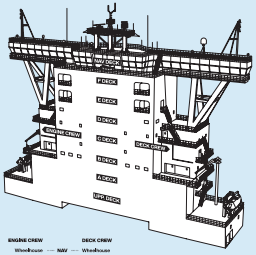
Sailing is hard work. It combines traditional seafaring skills and physicality with cutting-edge technological knowledge. The ship's structure reflects these different roles.

Below the Waterline: The Engine Room
Deep in the bowels of a ship lies the engine room. It's an inhospitable place where advanced automation meets gruelling manual labour. Even with technological advances, these remain hot, cramped, dangerous and noisy spaces where seafarers perform highly-skilled maintenance work on complex machinery, usually by hand.

The Main Deck: Battling the Elements
Out in the open air, seafarers wage a constant war against their ship's mortal enemy: the natural elements. Workers constantly sand, wash, chip, and paint every surface of the vessel to protect it from corrosive sea air, salt, and rust. Their efforts can only slow the decay, however; ships are so vast and the conditions so harsh that the hard work of cleaning and repainting is endless.

The Bridge: Navigating Bureaucracy
Up on the ship's bridge, bureaucracy replaces physical toil. Officers are swamped by paperwork, with navigational charts, safety certifications and communications from maritime authorities all demanding meticulous attention. "If a ship doesn't have a good copy machine," one officer remarks, "then it isn't seaworthy."

In addition to the administrative burden, seafarers must also monitor the multiple screens and navigational aids that help to ensure safe passages. Long shifts are spent squinting into the far horizon, transcribing coordinates, calculating dangers pixel by pixel.



ENGINE CREW			DECK CREW
Wheelhouse	—	NAV	— Wheelhouse
Chief Engineer, Captain	—	P	— Captain
Senior Engine Officers	—	E	— Senior Deck Officers
Engine Crew	—	D	— Able Seaman
Officer's Mess, Spa Crew	—	C	— Able Seaman, Officer's Daymsen, Swimming Pool
Crew's Mess	—	B	— Galley
Hospital, Sass Crew	—	A	— Watch-Man's Room, Public Toilet
Ship's Chandler	—	UPP	— Incinerator & Garbage Store

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05

WELCOME TO PARK MAASVLAKTE

06/08

HET LEVEN VAN EEN ZEEMAN: OP ZEE HOORT NIEMAND JE HUILEN

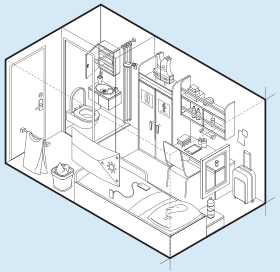
Het leven op zee is eenzaam. Ondanks het feit dat ze dicht bij elkaar wonen en werken, voelen zeelieden zich vaak geïsoleerd en ongezien. De veeleisende en monotone omstandigheden eisen hun tol. Vroeger "sponnen" zeelieden garen. Ze deelden verhalen en zongen liedjes om de tijd te doden. Tijdens het repareren van touwen en netten smeden ze sterke banden met elkaar. Deze collectieve ervaring is nu vervangen door telefoongesprekken met geliefden thuis via satelliet internetverbindingen.

Schepen zijn groter geworden en vervoeren meer vracht dan ooit tevoren, maar ze hebben minder bemanning nodig. De ervaring van de zeeman verandert eveneens. De gemeenschappelijke activiteit van garen spinnen is ingeruilt voor de eenzame gloed van schermen. De uitgestrektheid van de oceaan, de beperkte ruimte op het schip en de afstand tot thuis versterken gevoelens van heimwee en isolatie. Dit zijn gevoelens die alle zeelieden maar al te goed kennen. Op zee is eenzaamheid een constante metgezel.

THE LIFE OF A SAILOR: AT SEA, NOBODY CAN HEAR YOU CRY

Life at sea is a lonely one. Despite living and working in close quarters, seafarers are often unseen and isolated while the demanding and tedious conditions take their toll. In the past, sailors would "spin a yarn," sharing stories and songs to pass the time and build bonds as they repaired ropes and nets. That collective experience has been replaced by calls to loved ones back home via satellite internet connections.

Ships have grown larger and carry more cargo than ever, yet they require fewer crew. The seafarer's experience is changing too, the collectivity of yarn-spinning replaced by the solitary glow of screens. The vastness of the ocean, the confinement of the ship and the distance from home all contribute to a sense of homesickness and isolation that all seafarers know too well. At sea, loneliness is a constant companion.



REFLECTIES VAN EEN HUIFLINSE ZEEMAN

"De zee dobt je op, er is geen ontsnappen aan de horizon. Je hut biedt bescherming tegen het eindeloze blauw, maar voelt soms ook als een gevangenis—een plek waar je je ziel verkwist aan de eentonigheid van monsters. Sommige dagen vind je rust, andere dagen overheerst de eenzaamheid. Het is alsof je kreft in het oog van een storm die nooit opkwakt."

REFLECTIONS OF A FILIPINO SAILOR

"Living in a small cabin on a massive containership for months feels like drifting between worlds. The sea swallows you up; there's no escape from the horizon. Your cabin becomes a cage of boredom at times. Some days I also trace yourself a low afloat on a giant, harness-g metal beast. Some days, it's peace. Other days, it's isolation. It's like living in the eye of a storm that never ends."

For more info
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06

Outdoor Overlooks, including NFC chip
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#03 MIS

#03 MIS

WELCOME TO PARK MAASVLAKTE

07/08

HET ZEEMAN'S REGIME: HIËRARCHIE OP ZEE

Er heerst een strikte sociale orde aan boord van schepen. Het schip is rondom deze hiërarchie ontworpen. Kapiteins en hogere officieren genieten van ruime vertrekken en exclusieve voorzieningen, terwijl de bemanning onderdeks in kleinere en veel drukkere accommodaties leeft. Officieren, vaak Europeanen, ontvangen een hoger salaris en hebben meer privileges. De bemanning, vaak uit het mondiale zuiden, moet het met minder doen.

Deze idoof is ook zichtbaar tijdens de maaltijden. Officieren dineren aan linnen tafelkleden. Je rang bepaalt je zitplaats aan tafel. De bemanning eet in een eenvoudige eetzaal. Hun soort maaltijden weerspiegelen de diversiteit van hun achtergronden. Deze segregatie belicht de diepgewortelde economische en arbeidsongelijkheid in de maritieme industrie.

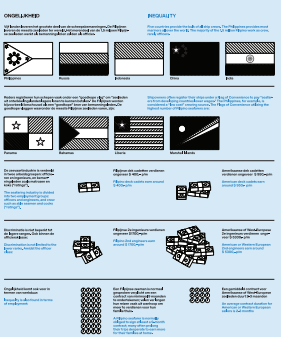
Het containerschip weerspiegelt de buitenwereld. Het is een voorbeeld van globaal kapitalisme, waarbij economische efficiëntie wordt afgewogen tegen sociale gelijkheid en arbeidsrechten. Naast hun containerlading brengen schepen ook de ongelijkheden van de wereldwijde arbeidsmarkt met zich mee. Sociale verschijnen worden van het land naar de zee overgebracht.

THE REGIME OF A SAILOR: A HIERARCHY AT SEA

A strict social order governs life onboard vessels. The ship is built around it. On the higher levels, the captain and senior officers enjoy spacious quarters and exclusive amenities. Meanwhile below deck, crew inhabit progressively smaller and crowded accommodation. Officers, who are mostly Europeans, enjoy higher pay and privileges while crews, who are often from the global South, make do with less.

Mealtimes highlight this divide. Officers dine at linen-covered tables, seated by rank. The crew, meanwhile, eat in a plain mess hall, their meals reflecting their diverse backgrounds. This segregation is a physical expression of the deep-seated economic and labour inequalities that pervade maritime industries.

The small world of the container ship mirrors the big one outside. It's global capitalism at work, trading economic efficiencies against social equity and labour rights. Alongside their containerised cargo, vessels also carry the disparities of the global labour market, the inequities of land transferred to sea.



07

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WELCOME TO PARK MAASVLAKTE

08/08

HET LICHAAM VAN EEN ZEEMAN: ZEEBENEN

Het leven op zee laat fysieke sporen na op zeelieden. Het weer verandert constant en alles beweegt altijd. Werkritmes kennen geen nacht of dag. Ondanks de vele beschermende uitrusting—maskers tegen roest, helmen voor het open scheepsdek, laarzen met stalen neuzen en zware overalls tegen de hitte van de machinekamer—komen brandwonden, snijwonden en gebroken botten nog steeds voor. Er is geen dokter aan boord, alleen een EHBO'er die basiszorg kan bieden.

Zeelieden ontwikkelen vaak 'zeebenen', het vermogen om gemakkelijk op een deinend dek te lopen. Omdat vrachtschepen een platte bodem hebben en zwaar beladen zijn is dat tegenwoordig minder belangrijk. Je kunt bijna net zo goed op het land lopen. Afhans, totdat er een storm opsteekt. Zeelieden ontwikkelen ook bijzondere zintuiglijke vaardigheden. Ze kunnen door de waas, hitte en schittering van de zee heenkijken. Ze zien verre stipjes, zoals kleine bootjes en boeien, die anderen misschien zouden missen.

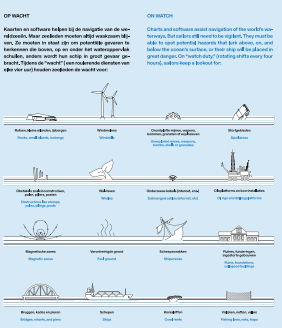
Navigators gebruiken digitale hulpmiddelen, maar bestuderen vaak toch ook nog hemelkaarten. Naast technische vaardigheden verzamelen ze anekdotische kennis. Zo veranderen de lichamen van zeelieden in vaartuigen vol spiergeheugen en oude wijsheid, met genezen littekens als bewijs.

THE BODY OF A SAILOR: SEA LEGS

Life at sea leaves its marks on sailors' bodies. Weather shifts constantly. Movement never ceases. Work rhythms have no nights or days. Protective gear abounds — masks against rust grit, hard hats on exposed decks, steel-toed boots and heavy canvas overalls insulating bodies from the engine room furnace. But burns, cuts and broken bones still happen and there's no doctor; just a first aid officer capable of providing basic care.

Seafarers develop "sea legs," the ability to walk safely on a pitching, rolling deck. It's less important these days — ocean-going freighters are flat-bottomed and heavily loaded, and you might as well be walking on land until a storm hits. Sailors also develop extraordinary sensory skills. Used to gazing through the haze and heat and shimmer of the sea, they can spot distant specks others would miss: tiny boats and buoys.

Meanwhile navigators use digital tools but also study celestial maps. Anecdotal knowledge accumulates alongside technical mastery, transforming seafarers' bodies into vessels that hold muscle memory and ancient wisdom alongside healed scars.

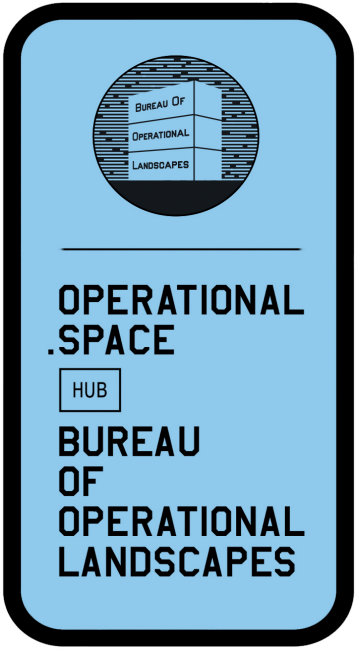


08

For more info activate phone & hold near NFC marker

Outdoor Overlooks, including NFC chip
Tap your phone for extra information

NFC chip activates extra information
Website hosts a repository of Bureau activities



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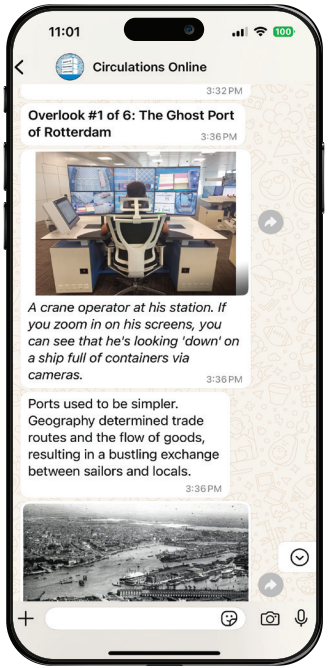
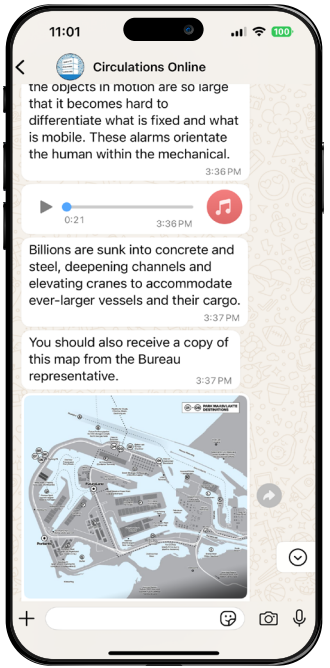
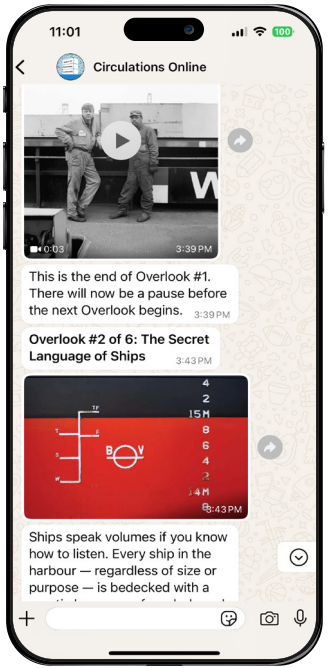




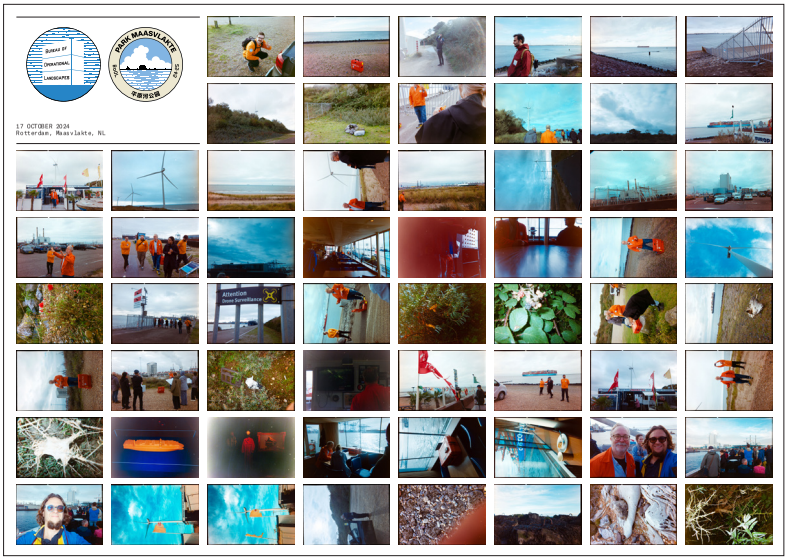


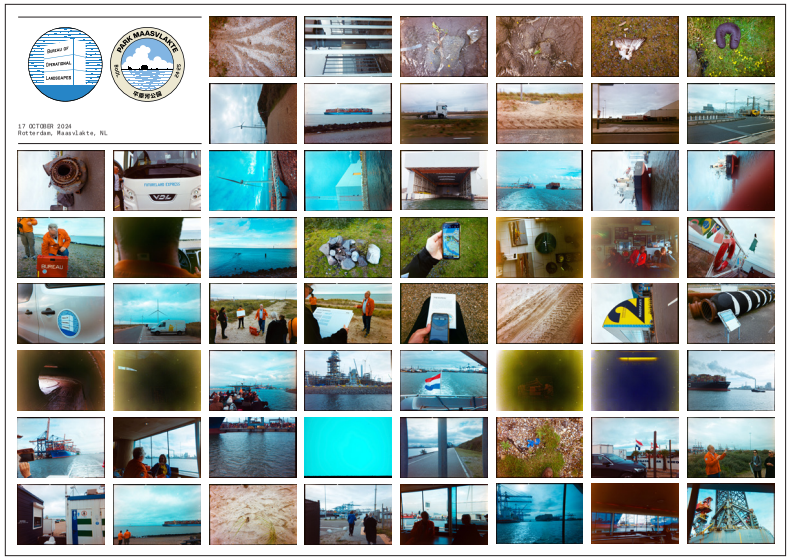
Scan QR-code
to activate tour

WhatsApp Tour
Activates parallel narration onboard
the FutureLand ferry (60 min)

Tour 17 October 2024

Tour 17 October 2024





A2 poster of disposable camera photographs
shot by tour participants

MIS #03

For the NPS, "overlook" is considered a place of significance usually centred on a singular focal point fading into the distance, a pre-negotiated vista established by an official office to assist the visitor in ensuring the best view is consumed [Fig.79].[715]

However, according to the *Bureau*, an overlook is a series of interpretive signage located at designated vantage points within a logistical landscape. Unlike traditional overlooks that focus solely on scenic or aesthetic views (such as a picturesque scene), the *Bureau's* overlooks are strategically placed to incite and inquire into the hidden and invisible aspects of the Port, provoking reflection of the site's complex of cultural, economic, or environmental significance. These signs trigger re-evaluation of overlooked and undervalued spaces, a path towards achieving legibility of the landscape. From this point on, any reference to overlook I use is directly related to this definition. I will use view, point of interest, vista, scene, et cetera, for any interpretive moment outside *Bureau* usage.

Taking a closer look at the word itself, "overlook" is somewhat contradictory: it is simultaneously a way of seeing and seeing nothing. As a noun, overlook suggests an optimal viewing position for observation, an all-encompassing view that takes in the broad expanse, and, because of such visual consumption, it is suggestive of an ability to know all. Taken as a verb, to overlook is to undervalue or discard something, relegating it out of sight, a view or an object that is not worthy of attention.[716] "Overlook" is more than just a moment for attention, its contradictory nature enables an examination of how knowledge is created and shared, what is overlooked, and why. Its paradoxical meaning can challenge or even reconsider opinions and expectations of logistical sites. Especially in the context of official landscapes where views are pre-ordained (implying that only certain scenes are worthy of a gaze), overlook as a noun and a verb opens up conceptual and spatial issues that surround the logistical landscape, and how such enterprises shape the land. Park Maasvlakte is exemplary of overlooked space; considered as unworthy strips of asphalt yet offering opportunity for grand views over the Port. Taking the word seriously, the *Bureau* overlooks overlooked space, pointing towards a logistical landscape that is ill-considered and a spectacle, yet hidden from view.

FutureLand states on their website that "Getting closer to Europe's most modern port is impossible."[717] Proximity, they claim, can only be gained via *their* interpretive tools, such as visiting *FutureLand* itself or any one of the "fotolocaties" (Photo Locations) that the Port Authority has decided are the best positions from which to view various harbour operations [Fig.80].[718] While there is a handy online map geotagged with GPS coordinates, accompanied by a photograph of the potential object of interest and a short "biography" of the location, only ten of the total 44 points of interest are situated within Maasvlakte itself.[719] Of those ten, two are located directly at *FutureLand*, while #33 provides a glimpse towards the construction yard of the Sif company, manufacturers of offshore wind turbines (written permission is required to film or photograph their property).[720] Location #34 (Prinses Amaliahaven) is not accessible to the public anymore. There are no loca-

715 "NPS Responsibility," National Park Service, last modified April 29, 2020, accessed March 5, 2024, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/scenicviews/nps-responsibility.htm#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20the%20National%20Park,historic%20views%20into%20the%20future.

716 "Overlook," *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed March 5, 2024, https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?q=overlook.

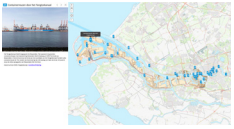
717 "FutureLand," Port of Rotterdam, accessed March 7, 2024, https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/to-do-port/futureland.

718 "Fotolocaties," Port of Rotterdam, accessed February 25, 2024, https://portofrotterdam.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Shortlist/index.html?appid=495d8d66d582475d880684cf29683da2.

719 The other 34 locations are sprinkled throughout the entirety of the Port, including various locations within the historical port, sites in Rotterdam itself (such as the Erasmus Bridge), and other locations that exist outside of the container terminals, like the Tugboat Harbour or the petroleum storage tanks.

720 "33 Sif," Fotolocaties, Port of Rotterdam, accessed March 5, 2024, https://portofrotterdam.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Shortlist/index.html?appid=495d8d66d582475d880684cf29683da2.

[Fig.79]


[Fig.80]

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721 "FutureLand," Port of Rotterdam.

722 "Understanding Scenery," National Park Service.

723 Freeman Tilden, "The Visitor's First Interest," in *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 4th rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 13-14.

724 Translated from the original Dutch: Port of Rotterdam, "Containerreuzen door het Yangtzekanaal," in *Fotolocaties Rotterdamse Haven*, no. 31, accessed March 5, 2024, https://portofrotterdam.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Shortlist/index.html?appid=495d8d66d582475d880684cf29683da2.

725 "Welcome to Glacier Point," *Historical Marker Database*, entry for Yosemite National Park in Mariposa County, California, accessed May 17, 2024, https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=63610.

tions sited along Maasvlakte's outer edge, which is primarily public space; this is the same strip of land that host's the *Bureau's* Park Maasvlakte.

Maasvlakte, then, is mostly overlooked by the Port Authority's own viewing recommendations, raising questions as to why *here*, why *these* locations, and why not others? Viewing, is officially organized by the Port Authority into a limited and controlled activity, validating how a visitor may think, feel, or sense what is happening "over there." The Authority's points of interest conform to an official narrative, presupposing what a visitor may encounter. For example, attendance at *FutureLand* will help to "Experience what it's like when everything is big, bigger or biggest!"[721] The *Bureau's* overlooks are not limited to only what is visible, but also point to what is passed over or ignored. Vision is restored to not just the spectacular but also to the banal and marginal, which are equal to any "inspiring views."[722] It is alright just to gaze upon something not-so-interesting, which raises the question: who determines the view's value and interest?

The American Freeman Tilden, author of the bible on interpretation design, notes that good signage collapses time into the present — where you are standing now — helping the visitor feel a direct connection with what they see.[723] Usually, interpretive signage features text, espousing, for example, historical context, recounting an array of numbers and facts, or sharing other pertinent information park managers find useful. From the Port Authority's filming and photography location #31, "Containerreuzen door het Yangtzekanaal," the entry reads:

> The Yangtze Canal provides access to the Maasvlakte. The largest container ships bound for Rotterdam World Gateway or APM Terminals on Maasvlakte 2 pass here. The Euromax terminal on the north side of the Yangtze Canal also handles such container giants. The LNG storage of Gate terminal is located to the east of Euromax. In between you see the white storage tanks of Maasvlakte Oil Terminal [Fig.76].[724]

Or, a sampling from Yosemite National Park signage from the iconic Glacier Point reads:

> People have been coming to Glacier Point for generations to see one of the most spectacular views on earth. For a panoramic vista of Yosemite Valley, walk along the trail to Glacier Point, located ¼ mile from where you're now standing. Along the trail, you can visit the Geology Hut exhibit on glaciations and landforms and watch for other interpretive exhibits pointing out Half Dome, waterfalls, and views of the High Sierra.[725]

This text is indicative of National Park Service style and rhetoric. Note the precision of location, of where to find the best view, and the inclusion of other interpretive possibilities. Here, views are pre-determined; all you have to do is show up and gaze, adding your contribution to the construction of an iconic view. The Port of Rotterdam's signage is less effusive and more pedantic, with little insight other than literal facts. While both entries are functional and each work in their own ways, they do not fully capture the potential for such interpretive gestures. The *Center for Land Use Interpretation* states that "The National Park Service is a master interpreter of the American land."[726]

The *Bureau's* overlooks are tandem partners to *FutureLand*'s signage, feeding and contrasting official rhetoric by intervening into what I deem their passive use of language, reducing public engagement to simply looking. While viewing is a central act, I see *FutureLand*'s signage as highly guided, limited in scope, and neglecting potential stories that may (or may not) be present within the landscape. "Overlook," as a set of contradictions, is a reminder that there is more to looking; it is, as one of the founders of the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers* states, an invitation into the landscape to enable the visitor to conjure their own subjective experience through the prompting of spatial sensation.[727] The overlooks installed at Park Maasvlakte are human and meant to amplify and shed light on little known or under-reported stories that operate at an individual level, in contrast to the macro-sized port hunkered down and obscured by distance and haze. Here, for example, at the Parking Lot P6 location, are four stories about the corporeal life of a sailor, while the overlooks at the Balkon van Europa highlight the elimination of once significant manual labour jobs through the rise of automation, referencing the Port's status as "the Ghost Port."[728] The *Bureau* subscribes to Tilden's direction that "the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation."[729] The normative treatment of the official view becomes just one of many possible outcomes to unfold on site.

AT WORK WITH THE BUREAU'S INTERPRETIVE DIVISION

It is late winter, not an optimal time to visit the Port if you're looking for climactic pleasure, but this is a perfect time to install a set of overlooks. This night, it is very cold; the wind as sharp as paper cuts striking your face. The Port hovers like a distant spectre, living up to its moniker as the Ghost Port. Peter and I sit idle in parking lot P6. Sun has set, and the last kite-surfers have packed up, abandoning the parking lot to us. It's time for the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes* to get to work. Over the next few hours, we work silently and match the efficiency of logistical movements across the quay. P6 has been surreptitiously transformed into the newly established Park Maasvlakte. Overlooks have been firmly rooted into the artificial landscape, now only waiting to be encountered by the public. Our operation was surprisingly smooth; this was one of the few times I was not bothered by any official emissaries. And yet, this night-time excursion leaves me slightly

726 "On Interpretation," *The Lay of the Land: The Center for Land Use Interpretation Newsletter*, no. 27 (Winter 2024).

727 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 405.

728 Laleh Khalili, "Forward to the 2018 Edition," in Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (London: MACK, 2018), x.

729 Tilden, "Not Instruction but Provocation," 32.

730 Scott, "Field Effects," 44.

731 Julian Stallabrass, "Negative Dialectics in the Google Era: A Conversation with Trevor Paglen," *October* 138 (Fall 2011), 3-14.

732 Nato Thompson, "In Two Directions: Geography as Art, Art as Geography," in *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House; New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), 19.

uncomfortable. The *Bureau* is not a radical activist group; thus any pseudo-guerrilla movements are unnecessary, perhaps even out of character. Photographically I only worked within publicly accessible space. I never crossed any lines willingly or knowingly, hopped any fences, or entered any forbidden zones. I was always clearly visible. My presence and proximity alone were enough to register official discomfort, which often materialized in the shape of various security actions. My body and actions exposed the limitations of so-called public space, drawing a kind of embodied map that circumscribed the liminal state between official and public space.

For the next installation, we decide to take a public stand, just as I did photographically, operating during daylight hours and in full view. Peter and I each don our *Bureau*-issued work uniform: a jacket emblazoned with our logo and Park Maasvlakte mission patch, replete with matching car. Instead of waiting for the kite-surfers to pack-up, we pull in alongside them and get to work. Our visibility and transparency defend our legitimacy. We were working under scrutiny, rather than in the safety of invisibility. Our visibility was produced by the time of day; our operation taking place within working hours just as it should be expected. My actions fall deliberately outside officially sanctioned guidelines and rules, and I do not seek permission. The *Bureau* works in parallel to the official, expanding its purview to be more inclusive of other viewing scenarios. The Park Maasvlakte appropriates the Port Authority's infrastructure, and so too, do my actions, working in concert with, rather than against. The Port's rules and infrastructures define the *Bureau's* movements and functions, allowing for possible weak spots to be opened for interpretive expansion. The *Bureau's* overlooks, from a visitor's perspective, are a legitimate exploration into the Port's various visible and hidden histories, redrawing the zoning and security boundaries as an inscription of public, not private, space.[730]

The *Bureau's* overlooks, situated outside official limits, signal ill-considered or disregarded — overlooked — areas of the Port. By selecting less prominent locations, these overlooks draw attention to parts of the site seldom visited or regarded (on the flip side, it could be argued a parking lot is frequently visited, yet seldom considered). These overlooks commemorate locations cast aside from official celebration. Some are situated in locations where maybe no one will drift, standing silent and awaiting interpretation. Because of their commitment to overlooked space, the *Bureau's* overlooks expose the limitations of the official view and contest what is deemed essential viewing. This prompts a re-evaluation of strategically positioned official viewing locations, which reflect the perspective of power. Officially sanctioned points of interest offer selectively transparent views, revealing only what the consensus deems fit to be seen and interpreted.[731] By stepping outside these limitations, the *Bureau's* overlooks reveal discrepancies in the carefully curated facade presented to the public. The *Bureau's* interpretive tools encourage visitors to forge their own path rather than follow the route predetermined by the Port Authority.[732]

WAYS OF (LOGISTICALLY) SEEING

This section focuses on the tour, what artist Sarah Kanouse labels the critical land-based tour — whether on foot, by car, bus, or public ferry (or all of them combined) — as a way to experience space from an individual perspective, outside the authorizing and pre-established dictations. It adds complexity and richness to the Port landscape, opening up other types of interpretation.[733] Ideally, visitors to Park Maasvlakte are left to consider their relationship to power and control, and the significance of logistics in the everyday. The tour instigates self-reflexive spectatorship while raising the question of whether it is even possible to alter a "logistical gaze" that is premised on detachment and distance.[734]

Relying solely on vision reduces any experience to a singular one; in a logistical landscape, this is amplified because detachment and distance are inherent. By introducing the overlooks and the tour, the *Bureau* posits that seeing is also an embodied and physical process, deeply entangled with other senses.[735] The British-American visual studies scholar Charles Jencks notes that "The world is not pre-formed, waiting to be 'seen' by the 'extro-spection' of the 'naked eye'. [...] *Vision is skilled cultural practice*."[736] The logistical landscape is further complicated by the official view. As I have previously written in Bureau Mission One on bureaucratic vision, a key factor of logistics is its dual concrete and abstract structure, marked by its simultaneously micro and macro scale. This perception is not inherent to nature but is a cultivated and engineered form of seeing. Through repeated exposure and interaction with such landscapes, the visitor is influenced by economic, logistical, and cultural factors that dictate what is, and what is not, seen. Jencks's suggestion of vision as a cultural practice shows that seeing in any landscape is a learned practice. A traditional understanding of sight, focused on artistic conventions and symbolic values, is insufficient in a logistical landscape; new interpretive methods are required to fully engage with these novel visual experiences, prompting inquiry beyond the Port's spectacular first impression.[737] The *Los Angeles Urban Rangers* note that interpretive interventions serve to surprise and see past the obvious sights and partake in other sensual actions of engagement.[738] Because the Port's intricacies are not immediately obvious, focusing on collective, attentive observation is a creative endeavour anyone can participate in. Together, the overlooks and the tour emphasize that truly comprehending what's before us can only be accomplished through site-based experience.

Yet while a tour may afford a firsthand encounter with a site, it can also be problematic due to its scripted and pre-planned route-mapping, designating some places more viewable or interesting than others. British geographer John Urry labels the way a tourist typically perceives and engages with their surroundings as a "tourist gaze."[739] This gaze is characterized by a keen awareness of particular features considered noteworthy marked with bursts of heightened engagement, such as when attention is directed to a

733 Stallabrass, "Negative Dialectics," 7.

734 Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 50.

735 Stephen Pattison, *Seeing Things: Deepening Relations with Visual Artefacts* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

736 Charles Jencks, "The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An Introduction," in *Visual Culture*, ed. C. Jenks (London: Routledge, 1995), 10, quoted in John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011), 2. Emphasis in original.

737 Jencks, "The Centrality of the Eye," 1-26.

738 Bauch and Scott, "Los Angeles Urban Rangers," 406.

739 John Urry, "The Tourist Gaze and the Environment," in *Consuming Places* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 173-194.

740 Urry and Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze*.

741 Urry and Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze*, 14.

742 Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 50.

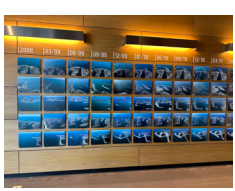
743 Matthew Coolidge, "The Bus Tour as Inverted Vitrine: Engaging with the Material Culture of the Museum of the American Land," in *Experimental Geography: Radical Approaches to Landscape, Cartography, and Urbanism*, (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House; New York: Independent Curators International, 2008), 43.

744 Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 47.

specific site deserving of attention. It "is not a matter of individual psychology," Urry notes, "but of socially patterned and learnt 'ways of seeing.'"[740] The tourist gaze, according to Urry, structures and organizes experience with the "other," a demarcation between degrees of pleasure and identifying what is "out-of-ordinary," thus shaping particular expectations and desires.[741] However, proximity to site outweighs such concerns. Unlike a museum with all its various labels stating DO NOT TOUCH and artifacts encased under glass and leering security encapsulated in cameras, sensors, and staff, a site-based tour visits the actual location, creating time to be within the space and place with all its attendant unpredictability and sensual revelation.[742] In the previous chapter, I offered the example of the *Center for Land Use Interpretations's* bus tours, where guests are at once spectator and subject, with land as mediator. Visitors are brought into direct contact with the physical site, which encourages not just visual appreciation, but also an appreciation for the affectual qualities of how land may smell, taste, sound, or feel. Being in the land is a form of receptive exchange, a visceral experience rather than passive consumption: to have been there and to have experienced rather than observed.[743]

[Fig.81]

[Fig.82]



[Fig.83]

Visiting *FutureLand*, I was always surprised by the number of people contemplating the exhibition displays. To give *FutureLand* credit, they have a wealth of didactic installations that are inventively designed and installed. One room gives the impression of being high up in some observation or control tower, with screens projecting a technologically outdated 3-D, 180-degree view of the harbour [Fig.81]. You stand at a small control module, swinging the camera up or down, left or right, consuming a God's-eye view of Maasvlakte and the North Sea. Then there's a giant globe suspended from the ceiling with its bottom sliced off at the 60th parallel south and inscribed with various maritime trade routes in red paint [Fig.82]. Under the lobotomized globe, you can grab a seat and peer up inside the Earth's guts, which are printed with a litany of Port of Rotterdam facts. Another exhibit presents 48 fairly large aerial photographs sequenced to show the construction of Maasvlakte in a time lapse over two years [Fig.83]. While these are impressive (and can even be fun) displays, I was struck that the majority of interpretive displays in *FutureLand* prefer to take a bird's-eye view of Maasvlakte, reflecting the inherent distance and abstraction of logistics. Standing in *FutureLand*, looking out from the very large panes of glass, I wondered: why not experience the place itself? It's right here. Being in the land, outside in the physical space of inquiry and participating in its geography enables insight into how humans influence, and are influenced by, the land.[744] Outside shifts reflexivity from the institution to the individual and creates a more sensual approach to seeing rather than the all-seeing control dictated from upon high.

INFRASTRUCTURAL TOURISM

According to Polish sociologist Zygmut Bauman, tourists are an indicator

of society's descent into late-capitalism, revealing patterns of modern behaviour as consumer-centric, where connection is fleeting and choices are driven by individual desire over communal experience.[745] And yet, Bauman concedes that "the tourist's world is fully and exclusively structured by *aesthetic* criteria."[746] The implication is that tourists would prefer idealized experiences that replicate beauty and the picturesque, and that are not marred by any grotesque provocation. In light of Bauman's "aesthetic criteria," I re-introduce the philosopher Jacques Rancière's conception of aesthetics from the previous chapter, which emerges as more than just appreciation; it is a way to sense the world in all its dirty, inchoate, and complex formations. Sarah Kanouse also sees aesthetics as a sensorial possibility. She asks, in relation to Bauman's message: "If touristic subjectivity is relentlessly aesthetic, could it not represent a site for artistic intervention?"[747] A land-based tour, she proposes, is a multi-sensory experience ripe for confronting the exclusions of the sanitized tourist's gaze, what I earlier proposed as a method to counter "consensus" in favour of acts of "dissensus."[748] Thus, "aesthetic criteria" is reshaped as not just an idealized picture of a site but as a way to gather the various conditions that shape a site, including the visible and invisible, the picturesque and not-so-picturesque.

American media studies scholar Lisa Parks, in her studies on satellite infrastructures, which mirrors the logistical landscape as "both distant and proximate, separate and connected, imaginary and real," urges the "citizen/user" to partake in critically and creatively reimagining the infrastructures that surround us. She asks if we can "devise [...] ways of visualizing and developing literacy about infrastructures and the relations that take shape through and around them[.]"[749] Her queries prompt artists to not only inform but to inspire and facilitate change through public consciousness. In her article on "infrastructural tourism," American media studies scholar Shannon Mattern revisits urbanist Kevin Lynch's idea that a landscape's "inner workings" can undergo a thorough accounting by creating "guidebooks to the sewer system, with instructions on how to read the season and the time of day by watching the flow," and using various tools to make processes perceptible, such as "signs, listening devices, diagrams, remote sensors, magnifying glasses, slow-motion films, periscopes, [and] peepholes."[750] Mattern's point is that tours — land-based tours — provide direct, multi-sensory contact with the systems and overt (and covert) infrastructures that codify everyday life, provoking "citizen/users" to experience the world around them in a profound way. These tours offer an aesthetic intervention into the mundanity of commodified — "logistified" — existence. Emily Eliza Scott, co-founder of the *Los Angeles Urban Rangers*, recounts feedback from a participant who said that they would never look at freeways the same way again after partaking in one of their tours. "Who knows," Scott says, "what this kind of change in perception might ultimately lead to[.]"[751]

I return briefly to the *CLUI's* Owens Valley bus tour that I introduced in the last chapter, which exemplifies this point. Here, the "citizen/user" is not just a casual observer but a critical participant whose experience is transformed through collective travel. Their voice is intermixed with the voices of the tour guide and external actors, both in-person and mediated through multi-me-

745 Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 50.

746 Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 30, quoted in Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 46. Emphasis in the original.

747 Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 46.

748 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

749 Lisa Parks, "Around the Antenna Trees: The Politics of Infrastructural Visibility," *Flow*, March 6, 2009, quoted in Shannon Mattern, "Scaffolding, Hard and Soft: Critical and Generative Structures," in *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*, ed. Jentery Sayers (New York: Routledge, 2016), 322.

750 Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 312-313, quoted in Shannon Mattern, "Infrastructural Tourism," *Places Journal*, July 2013, accessed January 20, 2020, https://placesjournal.org/article/infrastructural-tourism/.

751 Shannon Mattern, "Infrastructural Tourism," *Places Journal*, July 2013, accessed May 16, 2024, https://placesjournal.org/article/infrastructural-tourism/#0.

752 "Diversions and Dislocations," *The Lay of the Land: The Center for Land Use Interpretation Newsletter*, no. 27 (Summer 2004).

753 "Diversions and Dislocations."

dia presentations, sharing direct contact with the land. Multiple views are constructed, not least through the citizen/user's reflexivity which transforms the tour from passive observation to an experience in which passengers are implicated in the site itself, with participants assessing their relationship to the land, the impact their visit may have, and broader socio-political questions. At times, the bus itself becomes a character, transcending its role as a mover of people into a sensing instrument [Fig.84]. For instance, during the tour, the bus breeched the standard road and ventured onto the literal landscape of inquiry, where a US Borax Company representative had to help navigate the bus and its passengers through "startling landforms of the mining operation, where pools of bright red water enclosed by crystalline crusts and accreted salt cones create a landscape of severe desiccation."[752] Sensory engagement is key to any touristic experience.

This multi-sensory engagement contests Bauman's tourist syndrome, which can easily be seen in *FutureLand's* limited experiences. A land-based tour with movement, participation, and sensory engagement enriches not just a "citizen/user's" experience but also their responsibility and relationship to previously disregarded landscapes like the Port. While Rotterdam's awesome power and economic necessity are undeniable, a tour and overlooks facilitate acute sensitivity to its complexities, drawing one closer to issues of land use beyond the obvious. The final passage of the *CLUI's* account of their Owens Valley bus tour illustrates the potential of infrastructural tourism to initiate relationships with forgotten, neglected, unknown, and complex landscapes:

> 5:30pm - Indian Wells Brewery: Outside the southern reaches of the valley now, the bus stops at Indian Wells, a natural spring on the hillside overlooking the desert of Inyokern, Ridgecrest and China Lake Naval Weapons Center. The spring has recently been developed into a source for a microbrewery, built on the site by a disabilitied former local police officer. The brewery makes Sidewinder Missile Ale, Lobotomy Bock, and Mojave Red, which is sold by Trader Joe's. The owner shows us around and tells us about how Anheuser-Busch has tried to buy him out, not for the beer, but for the water. We eat dinner at the steakhouse next door, at long tables in front of plate glass windows, and watch the desert fade from view. Then, heading back to Los Angeles, we watch *Race with the Devil*, where Peter Fonda and Warren Oates pilot a RV through the plains of Texas, lurching and veering wildly throughout, in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to escape an encroaching Satanist conspiracy. The rectilinear interior of the screeching and careening RV seems metabolically connected to the tour bus, sensoramically emphasizing our empathetic connection with the protagonists on screen.[753]

[Fig.84]

In other words, infrastructural tourism is a ticket beyond artistic expression as a way to reassess a relationship to land use and its politics, prioritizing contact with the physical in order to transcend the official. As Emily Eliza

Scott has said, actions like overlooks and a site-based tour can "produce effects beyond the art world — on the ground, so to speak."[754] That is, in what ways can an artistic practice generate social and cultural relevance beyond its own territories, and extending into the landscape?

THE BIG, BIGGER, BIGGEST FUTURE IS HERE!

The *CLUI* provides examples of tours that invite visitors to act outside of traditional artistic expectations, creating "a complex set of interactions during the production, reception and interpretation of an artwork."[755] Sarah Kanouse notes that such practices acknowledge the touristic nature of artistic spectatorship, collapsing the space between art object and viewer.[756] Critical site-based tours strike a balance between place and discourse, maintaining connection to where the tour is performed — the landscape itself.[757] Art historian Miwon Kwon describes this dual condition as being simultaneously part of the landscape yet "out of place," capable of destabilizing and intervening into the official narrative.[758] Kanouse shares Canadian artist Ryan Griffis's consideration that tours act as narrative forms structured by spatial experiences, enabling narrative-based conversations that unfold through movement and changing perspectives.[759]

The *Bureau's* interpretive strategies facilitate novel landscape interactions, disputing the predicted "future" promoted by *FutureLand*. These approaches invite a plethora of readings of the landscape, opening possibilities for the Port's reconfiguration beyond its official narrative. The informality of the tour guide, who is still imbued with knowledge and rhetorical insight, can undercut the seriousness of the singular viewpoint that, for example, the Port Authority lays out, which is relentlessly upbeat and positive, never doubting the awesomeness of the Port.[760]

The American art critic Hal Foster warned of the adoption of an "ethnographic guide," a quasi-anthropological paradigm of artistic practice whose "pseudo ethnographic reports in art are sometimes disguised travelogues from the world art market."[761] For example, recall my earlier mention of the *FutureLand* ferry, a public tour boat that "sail[s] past new ports, ultramodern terminals and the world's largest container ships"[762] over the course of an hour, with a retired sea captain serving as narrator and tour guide, delivering a mostly scripted homily to the Port of Rotterdam's awesome power [Fig.85]. While the *FutureLand* ferry is not an art project, it does have the distinct character of authority: the guide being an ex-sea captain who once sailed the high seas and who now commands this ferry boat of merry (mostly retired) tourists imparting the official narrative of the Port Authority.

On one particularly memorable cruise, we were just about to pass Beereiland, when our ex-sea captain narrator noted that we might catch a glimpse of some seals that had made this habitat their home. Yesterday, he told us, he had seen a little seal cub and its mother. My heart swelled. My

754 Scott, "Field Effects," 40.

755 Kris Rutten, An van. Dienderen, and Ronald Soetaert, "Revisiting the Ethnographic Turn in Contemporary Art," *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 27, no. 5 (2013): 464.

756 Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 43.

757 Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 43.

758 Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 166.

759 Ryan Griffis, interview by Sarah Kanouse, December 28, 2011, quoted in Kanouse, "Critical Day Trips," in *Critical Landscapes*, 52.

760 For example, on the splash page of FutureLand, I came across the following adverbs and adjectives: big, bigger, biggest; newest; most modern; largest; in the world; latest; be surprised; development; promising; fantastic; unique; possible. All in about 125 words. See: "FutureLand," Port of Rotterdam.

761 Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?" in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, eds. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 302-304.

762 "FutureLand," Port of Rotterdam.

[Fig.85]

fellow tourists rushed to the port-side of the ferry hoping to catch a glimpse of the pudgy little animals; maybe the mother and her seal cub would be back. There were no seals that day. At this moment, the ex-sea captain, sensing disappointment in his captive audience, quickly regrouped and gestured grandly out towards the North Sea that lay beyond the little island, and stated, while sweeping his arm panoramically across the horizon, that "...*this* used to be the North Sea! Only eight-and-a-half years ago, when I started my work here, there was only water; there was *nothing* to see! [...] We made a new island..." he paused, "a new peninsula..." another extended pause, a beat longer than the last, and finally he proclaimed: "and *that* peninsula is called... *Maasvlakte*!" He was triumphant; I expected the whole ship to applaud the sudden emergence of this logistical landscape as a kind of miracle, conjured from *aqua nullius* and made productive through only the collective engineering might and cleverness of Dutch maritime history manifesting in this one precise location. Such language is natural for institutions to promote themselves and their endeavours positively. But the issue resides in how such narrations are presented as *the* view, when they are only ever just *a* view: one of many.

Recall from Bureau Mission One the artist Vincent Enrique Hernandez, who gives tours of Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley in his nearly forty-year-old jalopy, using humour and irony to challenge the Valley's stereotype as a place filled with strip malls, tract homes, and freeway interchanges.[763] "Understanding the Valley," he says, is "about recognizing what has been said about it and then picking it apart and utilizing it and going against it at the same time."[764] Hernandez's vehicular tour is a direct counterpoint to the "official" tours of Los Angeles which present a glitzy, hyper-mediated image not necessarily based in this world. For Hernandez, he uses the tour to dismantle the hierarchies of representation, and also those of artistic practice, dissolving the privileged boundaries between artist and viewer. "It is suburban," Hernandez yields, "but it's suburbia turned on its head."[765] Ultimately, what Hernandez does so simply yet so thoroughly is participate in the transformation of space through the artistic format of a land-based tour, recalibrating the Valley as something other than a desultory suburban void one kilometre at a time.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE AWAITS

This final Bureau Mission marks the end of my theoretical, conceptual, and practical inquiries. In it, I examined how the *Bureau* utilized the overlook and site-based tour as interpretive interventions into the logistical landscape to re-contextualize the Port as a site of contest and collaboration. These tools extend photographic practice by calling for public engagement, contact, and participation, transcending passive observation and ensuring that the logistical landscape is distributed across the senses and not solely reserved as a spectacular image. I have demonstrated how interpretive gestures, modelled on familiar tourist formats like national park signage, can assist

763 Moon Unit Zappa even has a song about the Valley: *Like, oh my god! (Valley girl) / Like, totally! (Valley girl) / Encino is, like, so bitchin' / (Valley girl) / There's, like, the Galleria (Valley girl) / And, like / All these, like, really great shoe stores / I, like, love going into, like, clothing stores and stuff / I, like, buy the neatest mini-skirts and stuff / It's, like, so bitchin' / 'Cause, like, everybody's like / Super-super nice / It's, like, so bitchin' / Like*
You get the point.

764 Diane Haithman, "How Vincent Enrique Hernandez's Valley Tours Wound Up as Part of an Exhibition at the Hammer Museum," *Ventura Blvd*, accessed April 27, 2024, https://www.ourventurablvd.com/how-vincent-enrique-hernandezs-valley-tours-wound-up-as-part-of-an-exhibition-at-the-hammer-museum/.

765 Haithman, "Valley Tours."

in making the Port legible by initiating embodied and experiential actions. For example, the creation of Park Maasvlakte serves as an appropriation of official space, a gesture that extends visibility from an act of observation into one of experiencing.

While the logistical landscape is often overlooked, the *Bureau's* interpretive interventions serve as entry points outside official confines, inviting a physical relationship with the land. This experiential learning and direct engagement can lead to a sustainable and, potentially, profound attachment to the site, rather than casual dismissal or neglect. Through the overlooks and site-based tour, the *Bureau* introduces alternative, even contradictory, signals into the narrative, intervening into state-sanctioned experiences like *FutureLand*. The "citizen/user" recognizes the Port's complexity and significance by acknowledging its social and power relations and moves beyond a simplistic or simply functional view. These interventions initiated by the *Bureau* demonstrate that logistical landscapes are more than the sum of their supposedly mundane and banal parts, and that they are also sites heaving with stories, histories, and futures that lie latent, waiting for activation. The *Bureau* acts as an agent, transforming the Port from a hidden and inchoate landscape, and, following Rancière's ideas, into a space that can be perceived, experienced, and collaboratively reimagined over time through the participation of citizens/users. In the end, Bureau Mission Three offers a path forward; I see it as the beginning of a set of possibilities, a proof of concept attesting to the geographic imagination that can enliven and dissipate the official narrative in favour of a far more complex one. By not just rethinking but actively participating and experiencing the logistical landscape, I have used Bureau Mission Three to demonstrate how new meanings can be uncovered through acts of intervention, even in something as seemingly banal as a sign.

LOOKING AT THE LOOKERS

I've made a trip to the Mauritshuis Museum, what they claim is the "most beautiful museum in The Netherlands." A giant staircase runs up its centre, bifurcated by a wide hall which seemingly contains an equal number of 'Gouden Eeuw' (Golden Era) paintings and tourists. It's a bit of a mess in terms of the chaos, security idly meandering around, dead eyes reflected outwards from their numbingly boring jobs. Small kids run about; it's the Dutch fall break and while I applaud the parents for trying to enlighten these miscreant ten-year-olds, the kids really have no desire to linger upon, for example, Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder's *Vase of Flowers in a Window*. I could be wrong, however, as a little later I do see a few kids laughing back at Frans Hals's *Laughing Boy*.

But I don't care about them; I'm here to see Jacob van Ruisdael's *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Grounds*. The guidebook tells me it's in Room 12. Next door, there's Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*; that's the hot location today, even more so than Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp*. You'd think the tourists would be all over that one, but, then again, the *Anatomy Lesson* was never made into a movie starring Scarlett Johansson, so there's that. Van Ruisdael is alone, tucked into a corner with a beautiful seascape by Jan van de Cappelle, called, of course, *Seascape with Ships*. My goal today is to peer deeply into van Ruisdael's canvas and try to transcend the oil paint that is slathered onto the linen, and figuratively enter the painting in order to stand alongside the tiny, little, barely perceptible figures in the distance. They are nothing more than a few splotches of dabbled colour. Once inside the painting, I help them stretch their bleached fabric across the flat land and let it dry in the intermittent sun. I look around the landscape, and peer back at all those accumulated gazes.

I already wrote about what I found within the painting and the experience of looking at it, so for now, I reverse that journey into the painting and exit. I am back in Room 12, with the painting before me on the wall. I sit on a round leather sofa where a few other tired tourists gather for respite from the onslaught of lords, ships, decaying roses, bearded wastrels, and coyly posed women, some naked, others not. A man walks in, then others follow. Each of them is working in an orderly fashion around the room, intermittently stopping to look at the paintings. I am curious to observe the tourists's gaze, how they look and comport themselves. There's some rhythm to their pictorial assessment; most enter through the main passageway, where van Ruisdael would lay about equidistant on the opposite side. Working clockwise or the reverse around the room, each painting gets a few seconds of glimpses, accumulating into hundreds of seconds over the

course of a day. Some viewers linger longer, refocusing their gaze towards the neatly displayed label in Dutch and English; sometimes, a painting will also have a short story included.

Luckily, *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Grounds* does have a small biographical text. I read it. To summarize, the curators of the Mauritshuis do not say it is the most famous cityscape of the 17th century; they reserve that for Vermeer's *View of Delft*. Instead, they write that van Ruisdael captured the essence of the Dutch landscape. I can abide by that; it certainly is indicative, what with the productive landscape on full view, church spires intermingled with windmills, and corpulent clouds only able to blot out parts of the sun. I've always liked the title: *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Grounds*. Who'd ever think to paint a landscape of what I presume is probably a pretty nasty, stinky job, dealing with bleaching in the 17th century? But that's *Landschap* for you. I read that the painting was acquired in 1827, but not from whom, nor how it came to be acquired. Van Ruisdael's painting is inventory number 122, and its size 55.5 x 62 cm. Quite small for a landscape I figure. But still, I like to look at it, and I like looking at people looking — something which they do constantly. Some swivel their heads between van de Cappelle's seascape and its partner van Ruisdael. No one really stays for long as they're probably excited at the prospect of viewing *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*, or disappointed after seeing the Vermeer, layered behind rings of passive observers, a brass rail, and hovering security, they're itchy with admonitions to not get too close.

My little experiment is helpful. I always struggled on how to articulate what it felt like being in the Port. It was like I stumbled into someone else's picture and they didn't want me there. It was a one-way view, and I was a casualty of observation, the equivalent to van Ruisdael's splotches. Paintings like this present the view to you like a window, framed and compositionally eloquent. Sometimes, a Lord and Lady are in the picture and act as mediators, and other times, you as the beholder stand in place of the Lord becoming his proxy. Either way, you gaze upon cultivated and laboured land, kept productive by indistinguishable figures whose presence you barely register, giving the effect that this is your view, your land. I never felt such ownership in the Port.

Out there, I was the one being watched. One time, an electronic camera stuck high up on a mast tracked my movement. I teased it: I went fast to the left, then I'd break quickly back to the right. And again, repeat the action. The operator would have to work hard to keep me in the camera's gaze. I understood then that I was just an individual kept external to any real functions of the Port. Being intensely watched meant I was intensely controlled, allowed to know only some of the Port's functions. The underlying suggestion was that I should not be bothered to

care. I was always amazed by the visitors to the Port, the dog walkers and kite-surfers whose preference was for the artificial beach up and over the other side of the dune. The Port was just a distant view, a thing to admire in all its industrial spectacular-ness.

That's why I came to the Mauritshuis. How do people look at a painting, especially a landscape? Could this help me understand my own position within the Port, to try and visualize who was looking at me? What does it mean to passively view a distant picture and who are the viewers? I discovered that usually, they were someone almost-elderly, people around my parent's age. Any younger and they just drifted past; not spectacular enough, I guess. Sitting for an hour, I counted the number of people who stopped for at least five seconds: 17. I sensed they were really here for Vermeer and felt obliged to track through Room 12, just to say, "I went." The odd kid would go by, but they never stopped, only raced through; I had the temptation a few times to stick my foot out and send them crashing to the hardwood floor.

Often, a studious pause would happen, hips thrust to one side, shoulders sagging in the opposite direction. This was an anatomy lesson I first learned in high school, where I studied at an "alternative high," a sort of junior art school. Every Wednesday for eight hours with Linda (the school was so alternative we never had to call our teachers Mr. or Mrs. or Ms., always their first name), we'd do life drawing. It's where I first saw a naked woman; I rendered her in charcoal, first in thirty second gestures, followed by a few minutes, then longer: 30 minutes, one hour, two hours. I learned how the hips swing out on a slight angle, never perpendicular to the ground. The shoulders balance in the opposite direction, countering the angle of the hips, creating divergent bodily lines. That, combined with a swooping vertical slash is the upper body, struck in charcoal. This was a common pose in the Mauritshuis Museum when people would stop and look at a painting. It signalled they were settling in for a little longer than normal. Next, arms would invariably get folded. I even saw a few who, after a few seconds, would elevate one arm and grasp their chin in hand, resting their elbow on the opposite arm in a pose of deep thought. This seemed only particular to men. Women rarely grasped their chin in such a performance of pondering. After the hips, shoulders, and then arms, their head would thrust forward a few centimetres ever closer to the painting, just enough to really capture the detail laying latent in the paint, waiting for squints to activate it. A studious gaze, and thoughtful ones. Rarely, though, did anyone hunch over and collapse their back to lean into the painting, stretching and stretching until the threshold is crossed and the guard nervously interrupts your gaze to remind you to stand back: look, but don't touch.

Stand back, admire the view. Soak it in, consume it with your eyes and passively

make the view yours. It's the one opportunity we may have for such ownership. I started to understand the Port a little more, as a distant gaze that enraptures all into a structured, single point of view, erased of any rogue views. At that moment, a kerfuffle was occurring in the room next door, number 15. I didn't notice though, as I was comfortably transfixed, looking at the lookers. A few shouts and murmurs. I thought it was the kids, or just an excitable patron of the "Gouden Eeuw" of painting losing their shit over a Vermeer. No. As it turns out, it was a small brigade of Just Stop Oil protestors, the same group who had been making the news by dumping tomato soup or mashed potatoes over famous works of art. On this day, the protestors disrupted the viewing of *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. One protestor tried to glue his head to her head, while the other dumped a cold, congealed can of tomato soup on himself. It's all captured on social media. I was completely unaware.

But I thought about this event later. For months, if not a few years, I had been photographing in the Port. I struggled to figure out the photographs I wanted to make, ones that would adequately reflect the conditions out there. Part of my creative paralysis was that I intuitively knew I was withheld in a beholding gaze, yet was never able to photograph this, much less write about it. I understood that logistics was a like a forcefield, a structured web of vision that resisted any scrutiny or legibility. At that moment, as I was watching the semi-retired elderly folks wander their way past my favourite painting, occasionally pausing to glance upon the spectacular light that van Ruisdael so eloquently rendered, Just Stop Oil comes along and enters this dulcet scene, refusing to passively accept the view on offer. Theirs was a disturbance to the fine order that the paintings, and museum, presented. I mostly figured it out then and came up with a new set of words: bureaucratic vision. That's what *Landschap* makes: under the control of representation, a passive view of real estate that resists contestability. And yet, here were a few folks clumsily inserting themselves into this picture of control, resisting its structuring power and asking us to deepen our perception and relations to the environment. Being a passive observer is not enough. A new image must emerge, and not one that lurks beyond view, but an image where other perspectives help in its shaping.