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The Netherlands

The bureau of operational landscapes

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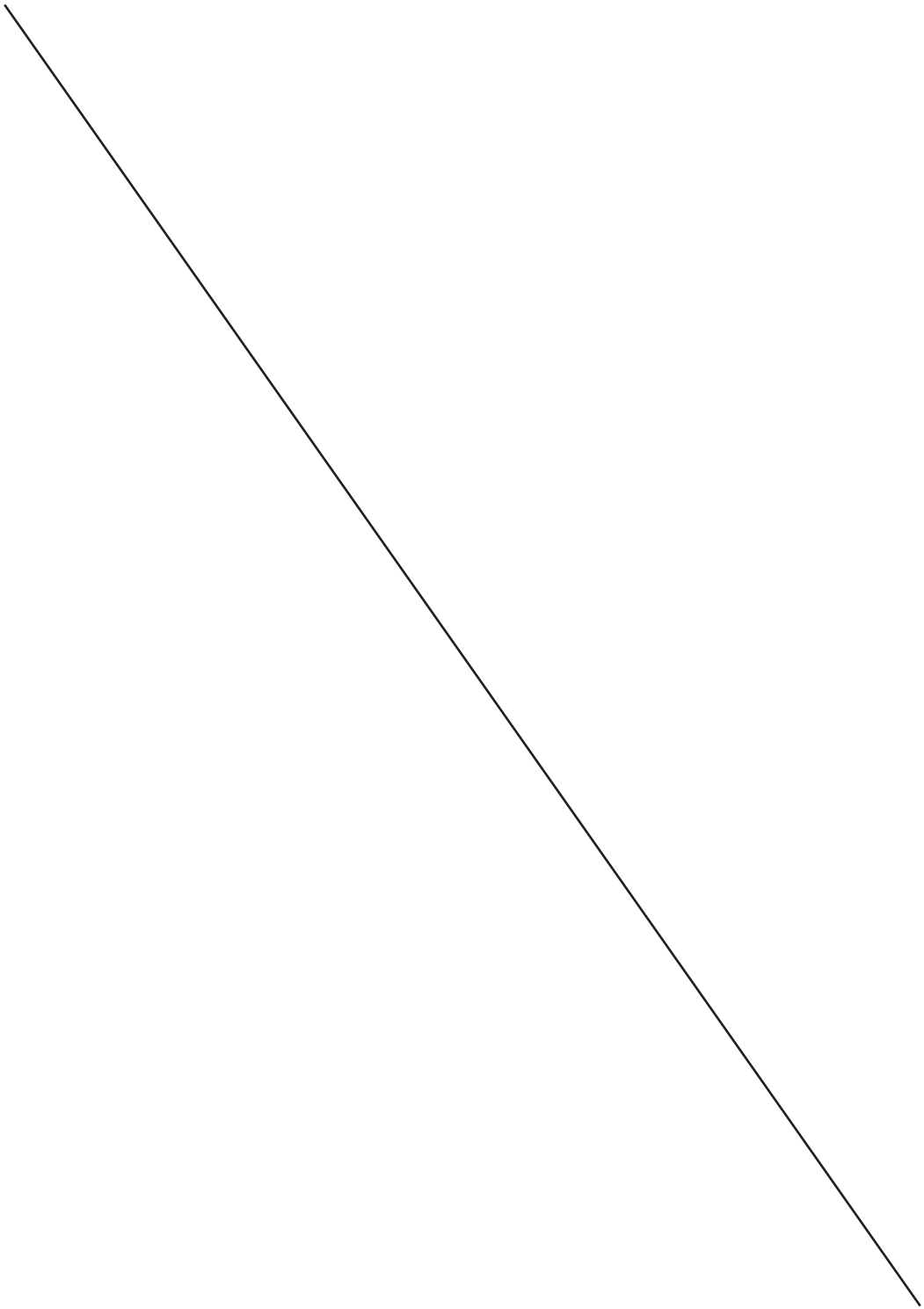
Citation
Weber, D. (2024, December 11). *The bureau of operational landscapes*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4172393

Version:	Publisher's Version
License:	Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4172393

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



CONCLUSION: THE BUREAU AS A PRACTICE

I began this dissertation in the "zero panorama" of bureaucratic vision – a denuded landscape where immense logistical systems pre-emptively script the image as a sort of "anti-view" – and this is where I return. This vision frames the logistical landscape as a physical and perceptual ideology, shaped by institutional, communicative, and material infrastructures. It ensures that the landscape is observed from a distance and remains uncontested and scarcely experienced by public intervention, excluded from external perception. Using the Port of Rotterdam's Maasvlakte site as exemplary, I examined how such landscapes function, are reproduced, and ultimately, can transform into a medium of exchange and practice, resisting bureaucratic vision's desire to freeze any inquiry, visual or otherwise, into a static representation. Instead, this research advocates for activating the landscape, encouraging citizens to take a degree of responsibility for their built environment, specifically the logistical landscape that merges the everyday with various trajectories and power relations. These relations are not easily confinable – or viable – to a singular location, nor can they be disregarded.

The contemporary spatial moment is characterized by a global sense of place that surpasses local perspectives. This triggered an initial question: How much should one care about their surrounding environment, regardless of its disconnection from ordinary matters? I have argued that all landscapes, particularly the logistical landscape, which extends beyond its immediate locale and is deeply enmeshed in global trade, offer a constant reminder that a Port, for example, is not a static or inevitable entity, despite what the Port Authority claims. This led me to address a sub-question: Where does *this* landscape end, and when does it breach the local in favour of something far greater? The answer was to find methods in order to reconfigure my practice to not passively represent landscape, but rather, to become a landscaper: an active participant in and with and through landscape. *To landscape* implies a sensitivity to topography, meaning it also pays

attention to social structure. This dual nature is discussed in Chapter 2, where I argued for the enfolding of site and sight as co-agents in order to see and activate a degree of legibility on how certain forms of power arise, thus enabling different means of contesting that power.

Prior to beginning this research, I had the assumption that a landscape only existed when it was viewed or became a picture. However, I came to learn that this is not the case when it comes to the logistical landscape. As evidenced by my photographs and texts, bureaucratic and logistical controls are contingent to the landscape, influencing visibility and perception. These controls create an official perspective that simultaneously reveals and obscures the landscape, highlighting its integral yet only vaguely comprehensible social roles. This led to a central discovery that the logistical landscape is already cognitively pre-encountered, offering a challenge to any attempt at representing it outside of the established views. This presented a significant dilemma that I sought to understand: if the representation of the land is not achieved through photographs, but rather through the control of strategically placed vistas and overlooks manufactured by the Port Authority, then any photograph I produce would be a product of this control. This means that I would be essentially reproducing the social and power relations that shape the logistical landscape's form and image. And here was the crux of my problem, prompting me to question the practice of landscape photography as I had previously engaged in it up to this moment. I realized that I needed to reassess my practice, unafraid to abandon its conventional associations with the sublime and picturesque in favour of a process that prioritizes experience over a photograph's finality.

Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrated that distance indeed procures an invitation to look at "nothing," certainly the case in the expanse that is the Port of Rotterdam. Paradoxically, as a photographer operating within such distant zones, I discovered that I have a unique position to intervene in this overlooked expanse. Although I initially approached this research as a landscape photographer who typically considers such vistas as archetypal, I was compelled to surpass certain conventions of landscape, such as the

framing of a view as property. Instead, I engaged in a process – a practice – that aimed to resist the rigid logistical view to make legible the economic and social conditions that fortify such sites.

Therefore, I established how the logistical landscape depends on the expertise and authority of officials, which limits the depth of public engagement to a superficial level. In response, I developed strategies and tactics to interact with the logistical landscape without abdicating to the expert, nor to ambivalence. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I proposed that moving through the landscape on its periphery is a viable method for accruing substantial landscape knowledge. Peripheral status granted to visitors yields unique insights because their understanding of landscape is precisely at its surface, and not at depth, like an expert's. Throughout, I have demonstrated that representation is just one component in a broader suite of actions that includes participatory and performative acts that contribute to the experience of landscape, and thus to its legibility. Rather than forcing the conventions of landscape photography into the constraints imposed by logistics, my research positions the site itself as an equal partner in reconfiguring photographic strategies that address these new spatial conditions. By introducing the concept of the "extra-photographic," I expanded the theoretical framework to enable landscape photography to realize its transformative potential. Building on this logic, I positioned the public also as peripheral, always moving through these landscapes in a temporary way and never settling. Given that the public's primary activity is focused on recreation – consider the dog walker who prefers the experience of the beach over the view of the Port – their experiences are furtive, forming relationships comprised of a series of glances that commands neither depth nor attachment.

This is the foundation and criteria for the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes*, a method that not only reconfigures my practice, but that is also an instrument to reframe the Port's perceptual infrastructure. Throughout my research, the *Bureau* endows the official landscape with cultural, social, and historical significance, casting the site in a novel and previously unconsidered light and nurturing a lasting

and meaningful relationship to logistics. It marks a shift in landscape photography practice as it promotes a multiplicity of perspectives rather than a singular point of view. The *Bureau* instigates a reciprocal relationship with logistics, and not one predicated on the one-way consumption of an official narrative but instead on the accumulation of contradicting ones. My aim was not to solely criticize but to also make legible the influence that logistics plays in everyday life. To accomplish this, I developed a set of "interpretive interventions": signage that I referred to as "overlooks" and a site-based tour. These interventions transcend representation in favour of the processual and experiential. During the production of photographs, I materialized the limits between public and official. The overlooks were designed to redraw space by inviting new narratives to coexist or contrast with those presented by the Port Authority and its interpretation centre, *FutureLand*. In Bureau Mission Three, I demonstrated how these interventions destabilize the official Port narrative by introducing new and diverse viewpoints in addition to the ones that already existed. As shown with its practical interventions, the *Bureau's* signage creates a reimagining of the official landscape beyond its prescribed boundary. The interpretive interventions prompt an unsuspecting form of landscape engagement, interrupting the standardized and predicted "future" that *FutureLand* allocates without hesitation. Interpretation encourages multiple readings of the landscape, even contradictory ones, initiating possibilities for the Port's re-creation as something other than its established narrative implies or desires. This is the character of perceptual adaptation, the forum where overlapping meanings emerge within the logistical landscape so that a legible picture can emerge.

ACHIEVING PERCEPTUAL ADAPTATION

Before concluding, I reintroduce the research question: To what extent can practices of landscape photography encourage the public in contesting and reinterpreting the official narratives surrounding logistical landscapes to achieve leg-

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ibility? Reflecting on this question, the evidence gathered thus far is just an indication that landscape photography, when reconsidered to involve more than the production of pictures, can not only contest but also reshape public perception of and interaction with the official landscape. The practices I developed within the *Bureau* illustrate the potential of photography to mediate and transform land, assisting the public to attain a degree of legibility of the complex, socio-spatial relations that form the logistical landscape.

Even though the *Bureau* inhabits marginal institutional logic and institutional character, it still operates outside the bounds of these conventions. For example, when installing the overlooks during daylight and working hours in what I named Park Maasvlakte, I still furtively occupied the peripheral edges of the Port's surveillance and security infrastructure. The *Bureau* hugs the fringes but never transgresses restricted lines. In the interventions, I purposefully used graphics and language that mimics the stalwartness of institutions, by re-appropriating not just the voice of the institution, but also the literal space of the Port Authority as well. As such, the *Bureau's* interpretive division doesn't conform to bureaucratic conventions, but actively counters and subverts such administrative control. Yet the *Bureau*, as I have pointed out, is not an activist either. Its role doesn't enforce a particular point of view but instead encourages a public forum where dissent and assent can occur simultaneously. At stake, I discovered, is a perceived or inherited neutrality, allowing not just for the space of activism, but crucially, for a range of voices to access and enliven the official narrative. This is the *Bureau's* particular strength, existing where politics is subtle, situated on the periphery of explicit advocacy.

Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated how the *Bureau* is an inclusive agent of alternative narratives through its production of interventionary tactics. I framed the *Bureau* as something akin to a park service, revealing that photography is just one of multiple tactics at my disposal. The *Bureau* extends the meaning of landscape photography, imbuing it with more-than-representational capabilities and positioning the genre as a set of actions that reveal a pre-

viously overlooked site as not only visible but also legible, helping to decode the complexities of wider, nationwide systems. The *Bureau* enhances my practice by introducing public involvement into the spaces that define the present moment, encouraging participation with the spatial politics of the Port. This aligns with the broader artistic perspective that art serves to reshape visual engagement by introducing methodologies that might, even indirectly, enable new forms of liberation, even if specific outcomes of such forms are uncertain. For me, that form of liberation is the *Bureau of Operational Landscapes* and all its adaptive, peripheral potential. I have shown throughout this research how such an infrastructure pushes photography beyond its expressive potential, what I earlier framed as "extra-photographic," to alight upon the transformative potential that photography as a practice has in reorienting perception to suggest new forms of spatial engagement, even if the exact nature of these forms may prove elusive or even impossible.

Landscape is charged with potential meaning. That is why experience and practice matter, leading me to the conclusion that landscape photography, when brought into contact with a structure like the *Bureau,* can be a prompt to inspire wonderment rather than dismissal. I conjure my research question again, which asked if perceptual adaptation was possible in light of such complicated, complex sites. By this point, I have clearly shown that yes, it is possible — with effort and without knowing the definitive shape of the necessary adaptations. Perceptual adaptation in the form of legibility and as enacted through the *Bureau* penetrates the veil of (logistical) indifference and helps us to look anew at the various ways that land has been utilized and developed, and how that land — its artifacts — are marked by various forces that resist scrutiny. By refusing dismissal, the various discursive actions of the *Bureau* encourage a perceptual adaptation to (re)-consider the infrastructures that society has built, reframing logistical landscapes not just as supreme monuments to marvel at, but as arrangements full of complexities and contradictions.

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