

Two Dutch landscapes: art and the mainstreaming of geomeadia.

My aim in this paper is to compare two images of Dutch landscapes, contextualising each in terms of their technological pre-conditions, and thinking about their reception and the discourses they have entered into. Both images have been produced since the turn of the century, and both employ and reflect upon geomeadia technologies. However, whilst sharing an overhead view and a clear relation to cartography, their differences are both marked and instructive, speaking particularly about social and technological developments during the years that separate them. Produced in 2002 and 2011, they sit either side of a period of profound change in terms of access to digital mapping technologies and remote sensing imagery: the mainstreaming of geomeadia.

The first image is a map of Amsterdam which foregrounds movement over static built or natural formations. Produced by Esther Polak (with Jeroen Kee and the Waag Society), *Amsterdam RealTime* (2002) re-imagined GPS as a tool for a bottom-up, participatory cartography. Over two months, beginning with an initially black projection screen, a map of that city was built up through the movements of sixty of its inhabitants, with the slowly accumulating traces displayed in live video installation: the image I am concerned with is the composite of all the traces of movement produced during the run of the project. Polak is one of the best-known artists to work with GPS and the motif of the mapped trace of movement, and *Amsterdam RealTime* became a key reference point for the locative media genre first named in 2003. By locative media I'm referring primarily here to a genre of media art that emerges in the wake of the ending of GPS's 'Selective Availability' function and the emergence of cheaper, accurate GPS receivers that resulted from this development, and a community of practice most visibly active from 2002-2005. However, the task of periodising

and genre definition is difficult, and 'locative media' continues to be used in both a narrow sense in relation to media art and in a wider sense in relation to the linking of digital media to location generally. Amongst other things, this paper will seek to distinguish these two senses of locative media.

The second image, 'NATO Storage Annex, Coevorden' is one of a series produced in 2011 by the Manchester-based photographer Mishka Henner, simply titled *Dutch Landscapes*. For these images Henner appropriated remote-sensing imagery from earth observation satellites that he sourced from Google Earth, with each image containing an example of shutter-control, the state-mandated censorship of sensitive military or government sites. The Dutch technique for shutter control produces an attractive, painterly abstract effect, something much remarked upon in the critical responses to Henner's series. This is just one of several series by Henner which gather and reframe contentious, ethically and politically charged material from photographic mapping platforms with a deadpan seriality (others include *Fifty One US Military Outposts*, *Oil Feeds*, *Feedlots*, and *No Man's Land*, which departs from the overhead view in collecting Street View captures of edgeland sites of sex-work in Italy and Spain.) Henner is one of a number of artists currently working in this vein, and such work has been enrolled in curatorial categories including 'post-internet art', 'the new aesthetic' and linked to themes including drones, surveillance, and militarized vision. It is photographic (in an expanded sense) and exhibited as such, in exhibitions, in artists' books and online.

In comparing these two works, there are many differences that need to be accounted for. Polak's work was a participatory artwork involving performances of movement in the city, and in common with other locative media practitioners in in the early 2000s, technologies had to be hacked together for the project: software had to be written to visualise the traces of movement in Amsterdam, and the hardware that captured and transmitted those signals consisted of several different bulky devices. By way of contrast, Henner's is one image from a series collated in a print-on-demand book – found on the internet, collated and bound on the internet. Polak's work was experimental; Henner's uses stable,

generally available technologies with a low barrier of entry. This is the difference between a complicated piece of participatory new media art and photographic appropriation – readymades, essentially.

By focussing on these genres and the things that separate them my hope is that I can contribute to a description of the cultural transformations associated with geomeia, as well as offering a better defined history of particular thematics in art. In particular, I want to consider the attitudes to mapping, tracking and remote sensing technologies that can be interpreted in the artworks themselves, in the statements made by their creators, and in the critical contexts in which these works were received. For Polak, that means the field of 'media art', where technophilia has often come hand-in-hand with practical, activist and critical attitudes to technology. For Henner, that means the expanded field of post-photography, in a period of art 'after the internet', i.e. art that takes things like networked computing, social media, remote and machine vision, and the circulation and proliferation of images, for granted.