SUPERDUTCH: NEW MEDIA, PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE INTERNET-POLDER

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Functionally, there are a multitude of internets, or rather, internet-polders that isolate aesthetics, memes, and trends; it is these spaces, these poldernets, that allow medium-specific critique to function by temporally defining any given medium or subset of that medium. The schema I propose, or rather adapt, examines meta-photographic / meta-digital new media works through a deconstruction of the polder model.

Consider the following: all web space is reclaimed, artificially kept online through a series of routers, domain name servers, internet hubs, and server farms, all directing information and traffic to domains much like the dikes and damns route water away from a polder. [1] I submit that the creation and presentation of work on the internet-polder is a cooperative and collaborative act that surrenders all work to this shared space in order to establish a localized, specific, context. Functionally, there are a multitude of internets, or rather, internet-polders that isolate aesthetics, memes, and trends; it is these spaces, these poldernets, that allow medium-specific critique to function by temporally defining any given medium or subset of that medium.

Defining photography as a whole is an insurmountable task given the breadth, scope, and application of the medium, but through the aesthetic and conceptual isolation of similar works, we are able to provisionally define a given media, or function of the medium, through the establishment and isolation of the polder as a microcosm of the broader field.

I aim to define a structure that facilitates the consideration of medium specific inquiry in contemporary photography / new media. In this, I seek to position the internet as a crucial incubator for the foundations of the new modernist inquiry that is reflective of much contemporary art. The schema I propose, or rather adapt, examines meta-photographic / meta-digital new media works through a deconstruction of the polder model. [2] This is simultaneously a reference to their geographic-aesthetic origins and the ideas of meta-photographic / meta-digital works and process-based inquiry. This paper is couched in the framework of understanding the internet and screen based media as a method of production and comprehension as well as a means of image reproduction, dissemination, and a venue for defining a medium.

By placing this discourse in the context of the polder model, we can explore and illuminate the context of the concerns of my contemporaries while positioning the internet as a necessary collective space for these memetic, temporal, and dynamic inquiries into the form, structure, and purpose of media.

While both new media and photography can be a bit slippery to define, I propose that we use a (temporary) working definition that will help navigate some of the arguments set forth in the following paragraphs. I choose to define them in this fashion because these understandings are not, nor should they be, static. Since allowing for updates to these definitions is crucial, I will source the most current, open-source version widely available – Wikipedia. Regardless of the structural problems, issues of accuracy,

and lack of authority, the form and format of Wikipedia mirrors many of the crucial principles of the polder model.

new media (art) is a genre that encompasses artworks created with new media technologies, including digital art, computer graphics, computer animation, virtual art, Internet art, interactive art, computer robotics, and art as biotechnology. The term differentiates itself by its resulting cultural objects and social events, which can be seen in opposition to those deriving from old visual arts (i.e. traditional painting, sculpture, etc.). [3]

While new media inherently evolves and changes (as its appellation suggests), photography has a tendency to be bogged down by tradition and hold fast against any fundamental redefinition of the medium. That said, photography is historically a medium of fluidity and adaptation with regards to processes and technological development, while remaining steadfast in its dedication to the ideals of the photograph as a mechanical reproduction of reality In this paradigm, the function of photography is often as translation rather than an inquisition.

photography is the art, science, and practice of creating pictures by recording radiation on a radiation-sensitive medium, such as a photographic film, or electronic image sensors. [4]

In order to render this a functional argument, we must ignore the ever-present concern that photography is in crisis. That said, it is still important to address the medium as we have defined it so we are able to consider photography as a unified concept that we are then able to examine and critique. For this, we will adopt a modified version of the polder model.

Traditionally, polders are tracts of land that lie below sea level and are reclaimed by various hydrosculptive means for agricultural and settlement uses. Apart from the shared structure of the reclamation of land/information, one inherent necessity in the creation/maintenance of a polder is shared responsibility and consensus. In this argument, that collective mentality is a conceptual precursor to the necessary functionality of internet tropes to shape and define a framework that encourages self-reflexive inquiry.

At last we arrive at the idea of superdutch. This term, as I choose to use it, is both an homage to Bart Lootsma's *Superdutch: New Architecture in the Netherlands* (2000), [5] and an acknowledgement of the beginnings of a new modernist inquiry in contemporary art that I argue functions within the internet-polder model. The acknowledgement of Lootsma's text in this nomenclature is a derivation of his observation of modernist trends in contemporary Dutch architecture. There is an international groundswell of contemporary artists practicing in the densely populated no-man's-land between photography and new media who approach process (or work) as *the work*. These pieces revel in their simplicity and richness of memetic [6] reference by mirroring frenetic thought patterns evocative of an active message board. In order for these works to function, there must be a shared space, context, or point of reference. In this context, our shared space and the point of reference that bridges the gap between these two technology-based media is the internet. It is our hive mind, our collective understanding, our polder. It allows us to reclaim data from the ether and isolate, rather than elevate, information/images and distill stimuli into some sort of discourse that is at once separate, yet always on the precipice of falling back into the sea should we no longer agree on its purpose. It is in this action that we can establish a working definition, one that serves to illuminate our purpose rather than attempting to define the nature of the entire medium. We are reclaiming land from the sea, not attempting to define terra firma.

The function of art qua process when applied to superdutch works is to question the "aura" of the work while challenging the structure of media and allowing process to usurp product. By presenting examinations of process as the final product, these artists are engaging in a modernist critique of technological processes as medium rather than approaching the implications of the processes of medium.

Here is where we come to the ideas of McLuhan. [7] If one accepts the premise of the internet as a venue for the development, definition, and production of media, as well as the argument that an appropriate metaphor for this phenomenon is the polder model, then you must also concede that these poldernets are temporary. It is in this temporality that we find the new purpose of the vast majority of works that fall within the scope of this argument. These works function as an inquiry rather than a statement; they examine and take inventory of the contemporary landscape and impose themselves upon it.

In allowing works to be isolated from the sea of imagery, we are not only able to foster a dialogue on the message and function of media, but we are also on a smaller level able to reclaim a shore on which to stand to consider this process. It is important, however, to consider how new ground comes to exist and why the polder model is crucial to the understanding of myriad contemporary works. The aim of these works is not to elevate any given stance, aesthetic, or augmentation of the medium, but rather, to come to understand what ground we stand on.

References and Notes:

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6. *Richard Dawkins, The Selfish Gene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).*
7. *Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects (Berkeley, CA: Ginko Press, 2005).*