



# IPFL x FPS

essays on the IPFL 2018 selection of photographers  
by students of Film and Photographic studies



# Analysis: From Fantasy to Reality

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The photo series *From Fantasy to Reality* by Ko Hage portrays the Dutch city of Almere. Hage in his artist statement explains that although the city is almost one of the largest in the Netherlands, for him and many others the city is seen as terra incognita. Also one of the largest artificial cities in the world, and made from scratch Almere as Hage states could be built as a Utopia or ideal city. After 40 years Hage explores the city to capture things that 'surprise' or amaze him' such as the street names; 'Fantasy', 'Reality', and 'Simplicity'. Hage describes his expedition as travelling through a time machine as the architectural style in each neighborhood resonates different decades. He concludes his expedition by stating that Almere is not the city that he expected but in all ways surprising, and describes Almere as an open air museum of the illusion of feasibility.<sup>1</sup> By analyzing a selected photograph of

the series and the series in its entirety, I intend to demonstrate how photographic concepts of place, space, and time are applied in a meaningful way by the photographer, both in this photograph and as a part of this series.

When analyzing the selected photograph, we can see a brick house with a grass lawn in front of it, together with a few objects such as garden gnomes and trash disposals. The house is surrounded by a fence and in the background other buildings can be seen as well. Without Hage's artist statement or having visited or seen the place depicted on the photograph before, it is not easily identifiable for the viewer as Almere. The selected photograph also does not provide any indication of Almere through the title, as there is no title at all.

Hage's photograph calls forth Ian Walker's explanation in his essay "Deja vu: the rephotographic survey project" which explains how we feel as if we know places, but when seeing the places in actual life they can become almost "hallucinatory". He describes this experience as "standing there, one is aware of how much the experience of a place the photograph leaves out".<sup>2</sup> In the selected photograph and series this is quite apparent as Hage in his artist statement describes Almere as a place that people know, but have never visited. With or without having read the description the viewer will always have a certain expectation of a space or place. Yet, we must understand that Hage's experience of seeing Almere is very different from the experience that the viewer gains from the selected photograph that is merely a frame of a place in the city. For instance, the selected photograph does not show the people inhabiting the house who bring different meaning to the space. Hage's idea of Almere being a terra incognita also brings up the notion of imaginary geographies as proposed by geographers Joan M.Schwartz and James R.Ryan in *Picturing Place*. Schwartz and Ryan argue that photographic images have been an important way to engage with the physical and human world, and aside from its many functions such as showing places, spaces, and landscapes they also create "imaginative geographies" or perceptions of place. "A powerful means of picturing 'place', both literally and figuratively, they have participated actively in the making and dissemination of geographical knowledge".<sup>3</sup> It is only from Hage's description that the viewer can





actually feel as if they can understand or know the place, or in other words the description brings the viewer under the impression that they are invited into a somewhat truthful representation of a space. Yet, without actually being in Almere the viewer will never completely experience the place. Not only is the notion of imaginary geographies present within the position of the viewer, but also for Hage who's expectations of the place Almere where not exactly met.

According to Tim Cresswell's *In Place out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*, in human geography we are constantly occupied with boundary making, which opens up to transgressions. Cresswell explains this further by saying that places are "fundamental creators of indifference". The outsider needs the inside (and vice versa) to exist in the first place. Meaning, that you are always either an insider or outsider transgressing through these spaces. Cresswell quotes, "An outsider is not just someone literally from another location but someone who is existentially removed from the milieu of our "place"..."<sup>4</sup> What is striking about the selected photograph and several others in the series is that Hage has chosen to present the outside of buildings, placing the viewer outside of a space. The place that we see on the selected photograph is what we can assume to be a home, thus a place that people live in. In the selected photograph a border is then created through the walls of the house, which therefore also removes the viewer from a milieu of our "place" in this case our "place" meaning those who inhabit the home. At the same time, the viewer is an insider in a less literal sense as the selected photograph attempts to invite the viewer into what Hage calls terra incognita. In general, photography itself occupies the maker with a form of boundary making as it limits us to work within a frame. With photography we then create a boundary of what we choose to capture within the frame/photograph, and what we leave out. Within the frame of the selected photograph the viewer is only able to see a small part of one space within the entire place Almere, as said before making it quite unidentifiable for the viewer. The series in a way is needed in its entirety to present Almere, but also to show the difference in architectural styles of the buildings. However, the photographs when shown on their own can project the idea of terra incognita as the viewer is not able to identify the place as Almere

without prior-knowledge.

In his essay *The Photographic Message* French theorist Roland Barthes explored temporality in photography and explained that time is the most impressive aspect of photography by stating "The name of Photography's noeme [essence] will therefore be: 'that-has-been'".<sup>5</sup> Or in other words, photography cuts out a particular moment from its before and after. We can relate Barthes concept of time to the selected photograph as it only shows one moment in time within a series of photographs that is very much about different moments in time, or as described by Hage the experience of walking through a time-machine. However, it is interesting to see that although the photographs do not show the before and after moment, together as a series they present different moments in the form of the different decades that come forth in the different building styles. Hage's series is not necessarily made up of photographs with decisive moments, but is much more serial documentation showing different moments in time in both the sense that the photographs were taken at different times, but also as the buildings show different moments in time through their architecture. As Authors Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest explain in their book *Photography Theory In Historical Perspective*, it is possible to experience a multiplicity of time in both a single photograph and as a result of a series.<sup>6</sup> When relating the photographic concepts of place, space, and time to the selected photograph by Hage and the contents of the series it can be concluded that the series as a whole inviting the viewer into the terra incognita of Almere and shows the city through different times, but simultaneously also leaves the viewer in an unknown territory or possibly even in the position of an outsider.

1 STATEMENT BY THE ARTIST  
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4 CRESSWELL, T. (2004) PLACE:  
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5 BARTHES, R. (1981 [1980])  
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6 VAN GELDER, HILDE AND  
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