

Paradox of dreams

David de Haan

There is just one thing that makes your dream become impossible: the fear of failure.

Paulo Coelho

Dreaming

In the 1930's Napoleon Hill, author of Think and Grow Rich, wrote: "Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve". This is the core principle behind most of today's motivational speakers and so-called gurus. Believe in yourself. Follow your dreams. Your only obstacle is you.

Today's life is very much determined by the ideology of this pursuit of happiness. You create your own life and you are responsible for your own happiness. It is no longer predetermined where you will live, what your occupation will be, what you will believe and who you will marry. We are confronted with an ever increasing freedom of choice. You can be whoever you want to be. You can achieve whatever you want to achieve. Whatever makes you happy.

This pursuit has sparked ambition. Ambition that has driven mankind to great heights and individuals to great accomplishments. Without ambition we will never reach our full potential. And without reaching our full potential we will never be truly happy. Ambition is about having a dream and the motivation to realize it. Chasing your dreams is the way to lead a happy and fulfilling life.

But there is another side to this paradox of dreams. Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve. That is clearly not true. There are lots of things we can conceive and believe, and still fail to achieve. The motivational speaker will tell us this is a negative thought. By thinking it we are limiting ourselves. With a positive mental attitude we can reach farther than with a negative one. The power of positive thinking is incredible. But there are limits to it. In this day and age our future still is determined for a great part by the place we are born in, the family we grow up with, the education we receive and the opportunities we get. Positive thoughts can't just take that away.

Most people dream of eternal love, yet there are more divorces than ever before. Most people dream of being rich, yet reality tells a different

Denn um nicht sehr unglücklich zu werden, ist das sicherste Mittel, daß man nicht verlange, sehr glücklich zu sein.

Arthur Schopenhauer

story. Most people dream of being famous, yet if everyone is famous, no one will be.

Why do we keep chasing dreams, when most dreams are never realised? Is it maybe better to not expect too much from life? Maybe even just withdraw from it. If we don't take any risks, we can't get hurt.

According to Schopenhauer everything is subject to the *Wille zum Leben* (will to life). A deterministic driving force to overcome obstacles and reach an ideal state. The world keeps moving because this ideal state is never reached. Life is a constant suffering without ever reaching its goal.

The will of people is an expression of this universal force of nature, the will to life. We are not free in our desires and dreams. The will drives

us to wanting more and more and thereby creates suffering. So how can we escape this cycle? Other than by death? Can we free ourselves from the will?

If we recognise ourselves in other matter, recognise that we are all driven by this same universal force. Planets, rocks, plants and trees. All the same, all subject to the will and driven to suffering. We will also realise that our alleged unique individuality is an illusion. We can overcome this individuality by losing ourselves in contemplation when observing all that we come across. The basic attitude of the artist.

So what should we do? Should we give up on our dreams and just contemplate on life, the universe and everything? Living life like a withdrawn ascetic. Maybe this is the most satisfying way to live our lives. But are we capable to do this? Or is this just another goal we can strive for but never reach?

So what is this paradox of dreams? A paradox is a seemingly contradictory statement that perhaps is true. Should we follow our dreams? Believe in ourselves and always strive for our goals? Or should we accept that our dreams are fed by a universal will and we will never find

I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be.

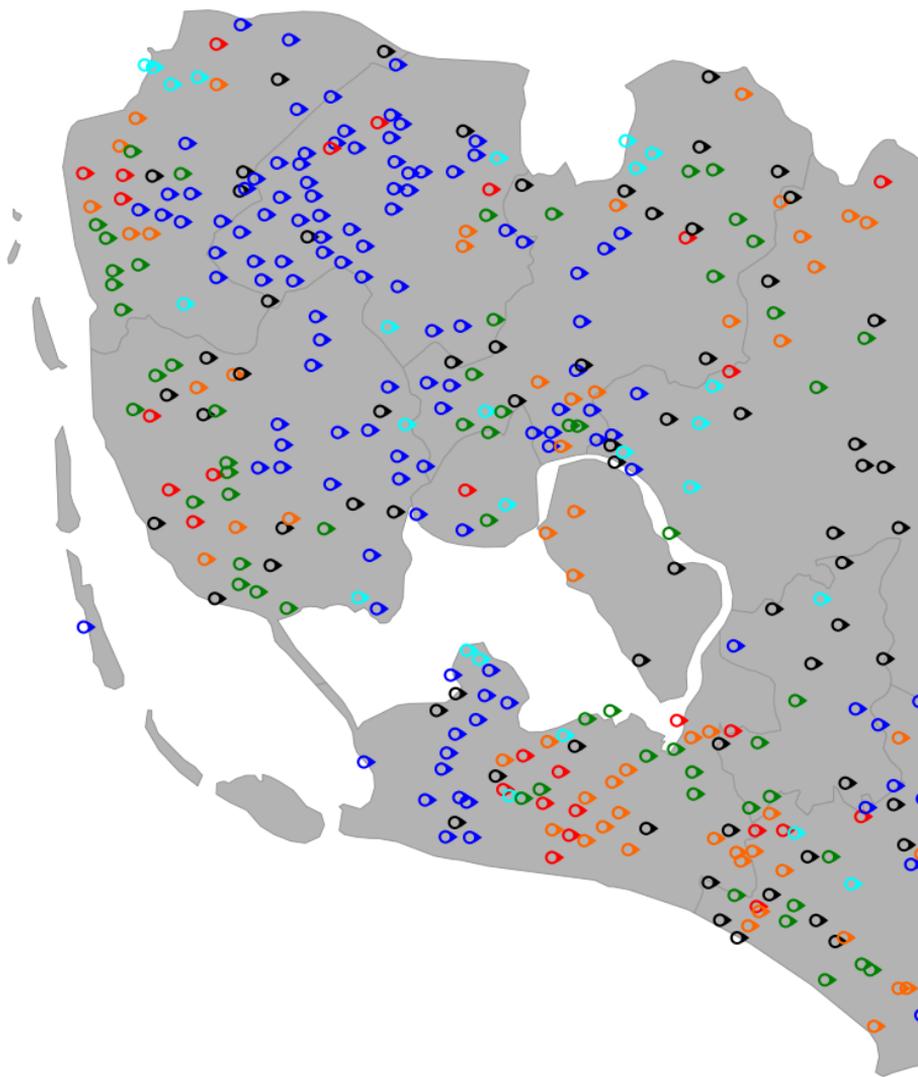
Douglas Adams

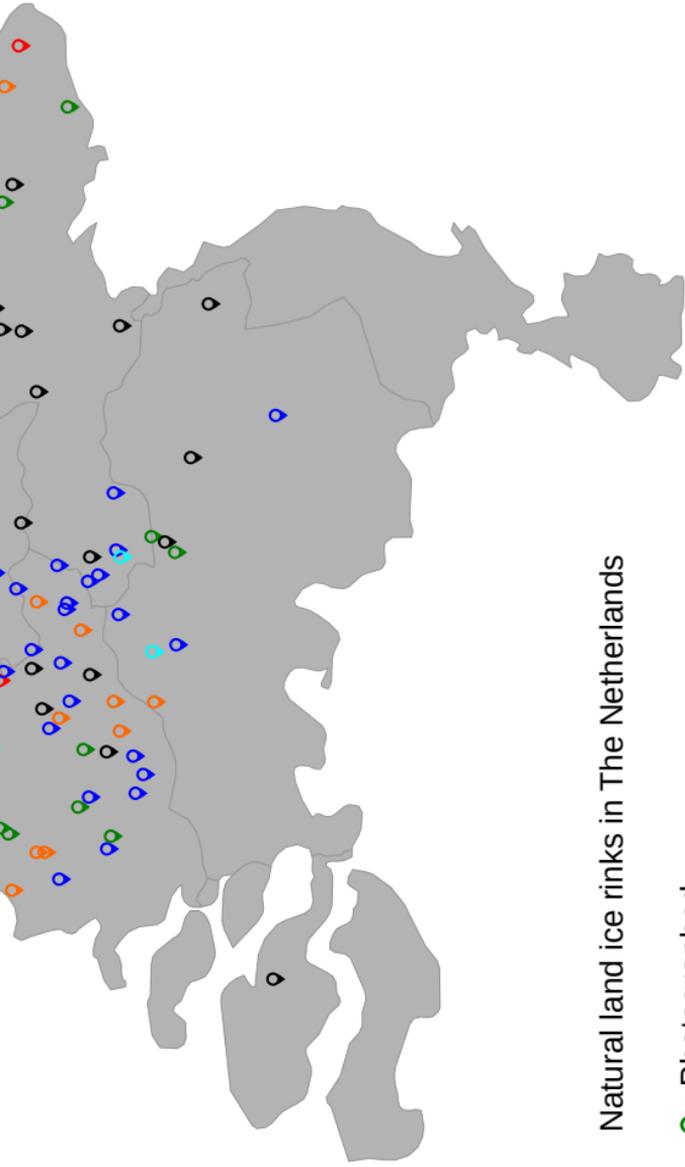
satisfaction in chasing them? That it is best to accept this and find comfort in contemplation?

I like to believe this truly is a paradox. That there is a way to combine these truths. Maybe following our dreams is about a journey more than a destination. Maybe we can be realistic in acknowledging some goals will never be reached, and still enjoy striving for them.

Natural ice rinks

The ultimate Dutch dream is skating on natural ice. Most Dutch people are able to skate, or at least they try when winter comes. In recent years winters have become less and less cold. It's already been twenty years since the last "Elfstedentocht" was organised, the ultimate skating tour on natural ice. Still over 300 natural ice rinks are kept in shape. These fields serve





Natural land ice rinks in The Netherlands

- - Photographed
- - To be photographed
- - To be visited
- - No access
- - Not fitting (inline skating)
- - Not fitting (other uses)

no other purpose than to be flooded when winter sets in. Waiting for a cold spell that makes it possible to skate on this frozen field.

The ice rinks in *Paradox of dreams* are merely ice rinks. They serve no other purposes like inline skating, soccer or Frisian handball. The natural ice rinks in this typology are just waiting. Waiting for that increasingly rare moment they can fulfil their potential. In most cases never to be reached.

All photos are taken from the field. I stood at the place that's intended for ice skating. The real world suddenly ends and there is this place of waiting. Because of working with an old fashioned analogue field camera the process was slow. There was a lot of waiting involved on these fields that thus for me have become symbols of waiting, and a place for contemplation.

When I started this project I dreamt of visiting and cataloguing all natural ice rinks in The Netherlands. Since there is no such thing as an official register of all rinks, I started investigating and visiting the rinks I came across. What started out small grew bigger and bigger. I now know of the existence of almost 400 ice rinks, excluding deep water ice rinks, and visited about half of them. Because of my dependency

on suitable weather conditions and access to the fields I have managed to photograph 65 of these ice rinks so far.

In my attempt to photograph all ice rinks I experienced the paradox of dreams myself. The moment I will think I have photographed them all I'm sure someone will alert me to one I oversaw. And even if I have photographed them all, will I feel better about my dream? Or is it perhaps preferable to continue pursuing this dream instead of realising it?

Photography

My photography stands in the tradition of the Düsseldorf School of Photography. Especially the work of the Bechers and Thomas Struth are referred to in my work. The street scenes of Thomas Struth have shown me that photography can be a very powerful tool if the photographer is capable of holding back. Objective photography, telling a story by just recording the world. And at the same time investigating the substance of photography itself.

Another major influence is Hiroshi Sugimoto. He showed me how to arrive at a more conceptual result without betraying the Düsseldorf

principles. Sugimoto uses the repetition of a photographic series to create conceptual works in which every choice, every detail is determined by the chosen concept.

The subject makes the picture. The photographer just points the camera where he wants the people to look. Photography for me is more about eliminating than about adding. No staging, no performance, no creative editing. Straight photography means eliminating distractions to show the real subject. By pointing my camera at a subject I'm telling everyone to watch closer. There is something to be seen in this place. This doesn't need exaggerating. It needs focus.

Art is about looking and experiencing. The contemplative gaze with which an artist views his world is the source of true art. A mindfulness that leads to original thoughts and original works of art. True art offers a way to escape the cycle of ambition and suffering created by the will to life. In truly experiencing art we follow the artist's gaze and we can lose ourselves in contemplation.

An artist like James Turrell creates physical places that eliminate distractions to focus our attention and make us experience reality.

*Je moet streven naar een minimum,
maar anoniem gaat het nooit.*

Jan Schoonhoven

Everyone creates his own experience. In *Paradox of dreams* I give an account of my attempt to visit all natural ice rinks in The Netherlands. They are a record of my experiences. But by objectively and truthfully recording these places I give the viewer the freedom to create a personal experience.

The pictures in *Paradox of dreams* are shot with an analogue field camera on 4x5 inch black and white negatives. Both as an homage to the Bechers and as an attempt to stay true to straight photography. The whole project is completely analogue. This makes every step in the process visible in the final result. The light that has hit the negative during exposure is still there in these analogue contact prints. For me the process of making these pictures is as important as the pictures themselves.

I photographed all ice rinks in grey weather conditions. Hereby eliminating the distractions

of shadow and light. I strive for an objective photography where the photographer is not shown in the pictures. Of course true objectivity in art is impossible. By minimizing my presence I emphasize the elements where my choices are prominent.

Technical perfection is also a way of eliminating distractions. Every imperfection is a distraction from what's being shown. Often these imperfections are used as a way to dramatize the picture. Instead I strive for technical perfection to keep my images pure. Unfortunately striving for perfection is also accepting that this perfection is never achieved. It is limited by the equipment used and the experience accumulated.

By objectively photographing the empty fields of natural ice rinks I created a typology of dreams.

Every subject has the potential to tell a story. The purpose of the photographer is to find the subjects that tell the story he wants to communicate. By making the straight objective photographs I intend to make you are forced to look closer. You are invited to discover the stories that are out there, always.

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