# Screen as Landscape

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127 to 130 inclusive between p. 96 & p. 97
131 to 138 inclusive between p. 98 & p. 99
139 between p. 101 & p. 102
140 & 141 between p. 102 & p. 103
142, 143 & 144 between p. 103 & p. 104
145 & 146 between p. 104 & p. 105
147 to 150 inclusive between p. 110 & p. 111
151 between p. 111 & p. 112
153, 154 & 155 between p. 115 & 116
QR code p. 116

Additionally, the extra volumes that accompany the thesis 'Touch Screen', 'Guide book' and the exhibition guide, along with a set of prints have not been included due to the large number of images contained within them and the resultant copyright issues to be dealt with by including them. These can be viewed by looking at the thesis in person at the University.

**Contents**

Don't let the torrent of melancholy and drear philosophy drown our world... We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone *made* equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against.[1]

1 Scene from *Farenheit 451* (Universal Pictures, 1966), directed by François Truffaut, based on the novel by Ray Bradbury.

[1] Cpt. Beatty talking to Montag, Ray Bradbury, *Farenheit 451* (Ballantine, 1953), p. 58.

## Prospect

### *Overview*

> A key component of the viewer's position in the cinematic century was to be immobile in front of the frame of the screen. In this new century, the 'postcinematic' viewer is ever more subject to an apparitically produced visuality, facing a screen. ... Our position is no longer fixed in relation to the virtual elsewheres and elsewhens seen on a screen. As the screen has become ubiquitous, the virtual window is mobile and pervasive.[1]

We have become habituated to the media screen, not just in the cinema or living room, but also on mobile telephones, advertising hoardings and computer interfaces. It has infiltrated the art gallery, its increasingly high definition, contrast ratio and immersive scale tending to blind the viewer to its mediating presence.

And what about the genre of landscape today, beyond the latest BBC wildlife spectacular, computer simulated Hollywood blockbuster, video game or Google Earth? As the screen populates our cultural landscape, and increasingly mediates between the actual landscape and us, where are the contemporary points of artistic reflection on – or resistance to – the screen's increasing ubiquity and transparency?

### *Range*

The words 'screen' and 'landscape' have slippery definitions, suggesting a multitude of things as isolated phenomena, let alone in combination. They are terms extravagant in their ranges, their meanings changing through different scenarios, both actual and representational.

The screen hides and reveals, filters and reflects. It is the white or silver screen of the cinema, the noisy screen of the analogue TV, the black screen of the digital monitor, or the blank canvas or sheet of paper.[2] The screen is all these, and simply 'a shield against danger, observation, wind, heat, light, or other outside influence...'[3] even before an image might appear on or beyond its surface. But as Kate Mondloch notes, the screen is usually encountered as an illusory window:

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[1] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. 87.

[2] 'If computers have become a common presence in our culture over the last decade, the screen, on the other hand, has been used to present visual information for centuries...' Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (MIT Press, 20001), p. 94.

[3] Chambers Dictionary, 10th edition.

> Screens themselves have the curious status of functioning simultaneously as immaterial thresholds onto another space and time and as solid, material entities. The screen's objecthood, however, is typically overlooked in daily life: the conventional propensity is to look *through* media screens and not *at* them.[4]

On the other hand, the word 'landscape' readily conjures images of a range of vistas: a chocolate-box alpine scene, an inhospitable desert of sand or ice, a tract of post-industrial wasteland, a picturesque view of a valley with a river snaking off into the distance... Picturesque means, literally, 'like a picture.' So, does the title Screen as Landscape just bring to mind a generic representation of landscape as an image-object – a painting, print, or photograph? Does it simply suggest a classic film sequence of cowboys riding off into the sunset, framed by cinema's silver screen?

And what is landscape, as opposed to land? Counter to picturesque or romantic 18th or 19th century definitions of the beautiful or sublime attached to transcendent nature, or the realist or symbolist urge to depict what is there, perceptually, psychologically, or socially – in all cases selectively – can the term landscape be used more freely to describe any representation of the surface of the earth? In this sense, a landscape is simply a spatial arrangement of geographical features, but at what scale? And from where is it viewed? At what point does landscape become a still life – a landscape for an ant? Is a two-dimensional map or aerial photograph a landscape representation, just as much as a painted, photographed, or filmic illusion of three dimensions? And what about the topographic distribution of virtual objects, digital or mental?

Landscape is under threat. Not just in environmental terms, or its ebbing as a serious subject for visual art, even if landscape representation propelled modernist painting into abstraction via Impressionism. It actually seems threatened most by the very act of trying to define what it is, of trying to enclose and categorise something in thought that is uncontainable, something that always continues beyond the horizon – or into the subliminal proximity of the mind.

*Approach*

In his introduction to Landscape and Power, W.J.T. Mitchell describes a useful conceptual framework for considering landscape, which maintains it as a live issue in relation to ideas of place and space, forming 'a dialectical triad, a conceptual structure that may be activated from several different angles.'[5] These are distinct yet inseparable influences on how landscape is conceived, and he summarises an

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[4] Kate Mondloch, *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 4.

[5] W.J.T.Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994, 2002), p. x.

intertwined approach thus: 'If place is a specific location, a space is a 'practiced place,' a site activated by movements, actions, narratives, and signs, and a landscape is that site encountered as image or 'sight."[6] For Mitchell it is better to begin 'with a triangulation of the topic. This gesture may actually be a reflex of some fundamental process in cognitive mapping as such, a way of orienting ourselves in any perceptual or conceptual field whatsoever. Our 'topic' (understood literally as place) then dictates a process of thinking space/place/landscape as a unified problem and a dialectical process.'[7] With this in mind, the bias of Screen as Landscape is to consider the term landscape as somehow primary: an innate mental topography, essential to encounters with actual places; a cognitive map which is adjusted and augmented through a remembered synthesis of the partial, multi-sensory experiences and impressions of places and spaces through time.[8]

Tim Ingold encapsulates a phenomenological encounter with landscape:

> The landscape, in short, is not a totality that you or anyone else can look *at*, it is rather the world *in* which we stand in taking up a view on our surroundings. And it is within the context of this attentive involvement in the landscape that the human imagination gets to work in fashioning ideas about it. For the landscape, to borrow a phrase from Merleau-Ponty, is not so much the object as 'the homeland of our thoughts.'[9]

This kind of attentive phenomenological involvement is transferred to screenic representations of landscape through this thesis, and is woven around a series of contemporary artworks – paintings, prints, photographs and films. To suggest that the screen has replaced landscape as 'the homeland of our thoughts' is hardly revolutionary.[10] It is, however, from a positive perspective that the artworks presented here are encountered, where rather than replacing landscape, the screen is seen to be augmenting perceptions and conceptions of landscape.

Through the text the word 'screen' will be used in the singular, even if it evidently contains a plurality of paradoxical or concurrent meanings (as already mentioned – to screen something can be to show, to filter, or to hide), and cannot

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. xi. [In a loose sense, the triad space/place/landscape can be transferred to thinking about the three-pronged structure of my thesis].

[8] Jean-Luc Nancy defines this same dialectical triad etymologically: '*Pays, paysan, paysage* (country, peasant, landscape): this is like the declension of a word or, rather, of a semanteme that would not be any of these three words, each of which would be one of its cases. There would thus be location (*pays*), the case of occupation (*paysan*), and the case of representation (*paysage*). The location, occupation, and representation of a single reality.' Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 51.

[9] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill* (Routledge, 2000), p. 207.

[10] This theme is continued in the chapter Screen.

be reduced to a simple definition in terms of type of imaging technology (projection or monitor screen?). The same singularity will also apply to the term landscape, as Robin Kelsey argues: 'the time seems right for a monomania of *landscape.* ... The demand for differentiation, once necessary and productive, now threatens to lead us into ever-narrowing inquiries and away from meaningful intellectual exchange.'[11]

By writing about contrasting instances of the screen and screening, and landscape and landscaping, it is hoped that a cumulative sense of the relationship between screen and landscape as a field of interrelated phenomena will emerge: distance or proximity, protection or exposure, limitation or expansion, separation or immersion. Along the way the plurality of definitions for screen and landscape should begin to cohere into something more singular – a common ground perhaps.

An analogy for a staged narrative between disparate artworks could be the picturesque journey – a Grand Tour. More fluidly, it could be an archipelago of islands linked by crisscrossing ferries. Yet the places to be visited are intentionally off the beaten track, more along forest paths that may or may not lead somewhere. Martin Heidegger used the term *Holzwege,* meaning 'timber tracks,' or 'forest paths,' to title one of his collections of essays, signalling an unwillingness to systematise his later thought.[12] A similar approach is adopted here, where particular artist case studies form a series of clearings, where the wanderer might have the uncanny feeling of having been there before, yet confused by arriving from a different direction, along a different path.[13] The effect should be cumulative rather than representing a developmental progression towards a conclusive 'world picture.'

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[11] 'Exalting historical specificity or differentiation per se (as if adding an 's' to every noun was a sure way to counter hegemony) has become a tired scholarly gesture. In this historical moment, the threat posed by the collusion of the plural with endlessly differentiating and politically neutralizing markets seems at least equal to that posed by the totalitarianism of the singular.' Robin Kelsey, 'Landscape as Not Belonging,' Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill* (Routledge, 2000), p. 203.

[12] '... Heidegger chose a term that carefully balances positive and negative implications. On the one hand, a *Holzweg* is a timber track that leads to a clearing in the forest where timber is cut. On the other, it is a track that used to lead to such a place but is now overgrown and leads nowhere. Hence, in a popular German idiom, to be 'on a *Holzweg*' is to be on the wrong track or in a cul-de-sac.' *Martin Heidgger, Off the Beaten Track* , Ed. trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge University Press, 2002), from the translators' preface.

[13] 'Even in one contiguous forest, there may be many such pathways, some of which connect with each other, some of which do not, and the pathways may be very different from one another (though Heidegger warns that they may appear to be identical, without in fact being so), depending on whether they are used by a single wood cutter or by a company with large trucks or other machinery.' David R. Cerborne, *Heidegger: a Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2008), pp. 101-102.

A prospective tract of wilderness will be made tangible in a convoluted series of approaches or attempts, providing a sense or impression of an environment within which to encounter particular, unusual, and visceral instances of landscape mediation and interaction. These instances are treated as isolated cases, in the sense that explicit references or comparisons are, quite intentionally, not made between them.[14] Also, scant reference is made to the broader field of contemporary art, attempting to situate the work alongside others in their chosen medium. It is left for the reader to make connections between the case studies, and to perhaps dwell on the inevitable plethora of contemporary artists who might find association with the thesis, or a particular use of imaging technology. Almost exclusively, the focus is towards landscape as an art historical genre and a subject for philosophical conjecture, together with finding correspondences between vision technologies and the phenomenology of perception.[15]

Amidst the clearings, there are several resting places, which serve to punctuate the text's meandering path, giving pause for thought. They are found to have the names Foreground (which follows this preamble), Screen, Landscape, Estrangement, and Background. Their purpose is not to summarise ideas arising from the previous clearings, or to set up the following art works. They serve to inform a broadening picture of the relationship between screen and landscape with which all the works discussed have a relationship.

By the end, and along the way, the reader should get usefully lost; returned to the midst-of-things, at the threshold of landscape and cyberspace, an interfacial interzone, before landscape and human subjectivity are fully encoded and integrated – banished to, not from, the garden.[16]

The meaning of the title Screen as Landscape should perhaps become ever more uncertain, the words commingling as an essence of something yet-to-be-named – an elusive metaphorical assertion, emerging as sub-thought, as sub-terrain, as sub-strate.[17]

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[14] Occasionally comparisons between artworks are signalled in footnotes.

[15] A phenomenological approach was used as a way of justifying an attentive regard to the particularities of art works, away from attempting to place work in the contemporary art context. I must confess to a very partial knowledge of current debate, which is born of a self-reflexive practice, immersed in the midst-of-things, that finds little correspondence to recent curatorial or critical prerogatives beyond those outlined in the Guide Book.

[16] 'Maybe history and tradition will fit smoothly into the information retrieval systems that will serve as resource for the inevitable planning needs of a cybernetically organised mankind. The question is whether thinking, too, will end in the business of information processing.' Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides,* vol. 54 of *Gesamtausgabe* (Klostermann, 1982), p. 119. Trans. Michael H. Heim, *Philosophy of Technology* (Blackwell, 2003), p. 543.

[17] 'But wilderness is still the scale and measure of our sense of landscape, even though the worlds we inhabit are sub-rural, sub-urban.' Don Gifford, 'The Touch of Landscape,' *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts,* Ed. Kemal and Gaskell (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 129.

2 **Hasegawa Tōhaku**, *Pine Trees* (1593), one of a pair of folding screens.

3 **Dan Hays**, *Kunming Landscape: Living Space* (2004), photograph.

4 Film still from *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), directed by Ang Lee. EDKO Film and Sony Pictures Classics.

## Foreground

Reversed as a title, Screen as Landscape becomes Landscape as Screen – a metaphorical figure lurking there, in the background. Indeed, foregrounding the background is the intention of this enquiry and a unifying property of the various artworks under scrutiny.

In the realm of landscape depiction, screens offer interior or exterior surfaces for painted or photographic representations of landscape such as Chinese painted screens [**2**], advertising hoardings [**3**], along with being various surfaces onto which representations of landscape can be projected [**4**]. *Screen as (picture of) landscape = landscape as (picture on) screen.* Simple.

### *Landscape as Screen*

In the context of actual landscape the screen can be an integral feature, such as trees or rocks giving shelter from wind or sunlight. These features can be arranged (landscaped), along with other human-made constructions or artefacts to offer physical protection against the elements or observation, such as a car windscreen or garden wall. The screen is also a mesh used in the mining or quarrying industries to separate different sizes of mineral.

*Landscape as (protective or filtering) screen* suggests that landscape (as perceived actual landscape and as a representation of it) somehow obscures or veils things, not in the sense that a screen of cypresses might hide the view, but by foregrounding a screen of cultural obfuscations, which tend to eliminate nebulous, ambiguous, or marginal impressions – and direct encounters.

All too readily, landscape is nature screened by culture, and culture reflected back by nature: as a scenic vista; a transcendent ideal; a detached viewpoint on the world; a fuzzily defined section of the earth's surface; a resource to be exploited; a spatial or elemental metaphor; an inexhaustible plenitude of varieties and types for geographers, geologists, ecologists, anthropologists, economists, sociologists, philosophers, and a genre of representation to study.

It is possible to conceive of a dialectic between aesthetics and empiricism which influences human perception of landscape: how categories of natural beauty, the sublime, the picturesque, realism or symbolism, etc, modulate and affect direct, corporeal experience (*Landscape as screen to subjectivity*); and how economic and technological exploitation of the land provides a selective view of nature not as landscape, but as a medium upon which to project scientific theories and ideas of control or use-value (*Landscape as screen to objectivity*).

The fore-grounded background, landscape as screen, is the plane upon which this enquiry is setting up camp for some field research. This is in order to try and recover the phenomenon of landscape from its containment within art historical

sub-genres, and its associated annexation into designated sites of natural beauty or virgin wilderness; and from its irrelevance as a subject to science.

For the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty empirical observation 'becomes purely a matter of knowledge, a progressive noting down of qualities and of their most habitual distribution, and the perceiving subject approaches the world as the scientist approaches his experiments.'[18] For Heidegger, rejecting this striving towards a 'world picture' through a 'flight into tradition, out of a combination of humility and presumption, can bring about nothing in itself other than self-deception and blindness in relation to the historical moment.'[19] Between empiricism (which is blind to the cultural idea of landscape, as opposed to terrain), and nostalgic retreat into a supposedly Arcadian past, landscape would seem to be in a bind. It is either in danger of losing its identity, exemplified by Charles and Ray Eames's film *Powers of Ten* [**5**],[20] or becoming a quaint anachronism, as demonstrated by America's most collected artist, Thomas Kinkade, Painter of Light™ [**6**].[21]

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[18] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), (Routledge, 1962/ 2002), p. 28. He continues: 'If on the other hand we admit that all these 'projections', all these 'associations', all these 'transferences' are based on some intrinsic characteristic of the object, the 'human world' ceases to be a metaphor and becomes once more what it really is, the seat and as it were the *homeland* of our thoughts.'

[19] Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture,' *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. W. Lovitt (Harper and Row, 1977), p. 136.

[20] Charles and Ray Eames's film *Powers of Ten* (1977), funded by IBM, presents the logarithmic powers of ten from the scale of the quark ($10^{-18}$) to the edge of the known universe ($10^{+25}$). The film commences by positioning the viewer looking vertically down, about one meter above the ground, and then zooms out to the edge of the observable universe by a factor of ten every ten seconds, past planets and galaxies. At this point the narrator comments, 'This emptiness is normal. The richness of our own neighborhood is the exception.' The film then propels the audience, helter-skelter, back to Earth and into the sub-atomic limits of empiricist conjecture. These vertiginous extensions of perspective happen via the human scale of a tranquil scene: a couple picnicking by the shore of a lake in Chicago. *Powers of Ten* offers a supreme challenge to the viewer's subjectivity, making the friendly word 'neighborhood' entirely redundant. Human conceptions of landscape as a pictorial or geographical genre have all but flown out of the window, remaining within a rarified zone, perhaps between 10 and 10,000 meters; before the genres of portraiture, still life or microscopy are indicated; or the circle of the globe seen from space implies astronomy. Is the Earth seen from space a landscape?

[21] It is estimated that one in twenty homes in the US display a Kinkade landscape. 'To me, Ireland means tradition and stability — charming customs, love of family, a faith as enduring as the austere, ruggedly beautiful landscape itself. The Ireland I've portrayed in *Emerald Isle Cottage* is a land rooted in the earth, but touched by a heavenly light.' – Thomas Kinkade, www.thomaskinkade.com [Kinkade died on 6th April 2012, a week after tentatively incorporating him into this text].

5 **Charles and Ray Eames**, *Powers of Ten* (1977), film-stills.

6 **Thomas Kinkade**, *Emerald Isle Cottage*, unspecified date.

Jean-Luc Nancy asks the question: 'How does landscape distinguish the indistinct and indistinguish the distinct?'[22] It is towards this conundrum – the elusiveness of the concept of landscape – that the agency of the screen can offer a response. Through its apparatuses – its inhuman lenses and artificial surfaces – the screen can reveal forms of imaging analogous to, but not identical with, human perception of landscape, which is exactly defined by its continual formation and disappearance, its dependence on separation and memory alongside vivid, corporeal experience.

*Screen as Landscape*

[22] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 52.

7 A vignette symbolizing love: Pair of birds, flowers, and Cupid's bow, arrows and quiver (1900).

8 Victorian vignette chromolithographs (Dover Publishing).

9 19th century vignette engraving of a waterfall in Devonshire.

> Even the animal by its artful instincts *sets itself apart, preserves itself*; the human being in all conditions fortifies himself against nature in order to avoid its thousandfold evils and enjoy only the measure of goodness it accords; until he finally succeeds as far as possible in encasing the circle of all his genuine and acquired needs within a palace, in holding all the scattered beauty and happiness spellbound within its glass walls, where he then becomes softer and softer, substitutes joys of the soul for joys of the body, and his powers, with nothing disagreeable to tauten them to natural uses, melt away into virtue, beneficence, sensibility.[23]

The vignette is a form of pictorial composition where the object, a group of objects, or the central area of a scene, are contained within a non-rectilinear shape, often following the outlines of forms. They emerged within manuscripts and books, as small decorative designs and illustrations, often representing branches, leaves or grapes (hence *vine*-ette), on the title page, or the beginning and ending of chapters [7, **8**].

They have a close affinity to artist's sketches, where composition within the frame of a rectangle is ignored in order to focus on a portrait or detail of a scene, often with a suggestion of a continuing background fading into the blank paper. In European painting it may be found in watercolours, but seldom in larger oil paintings (thinking of Stubbs's *Whistlejacket* as an exception, and some of Cézanne's 'unfinished' landscapes). But within the art of engraving the vignette became commonplace in the early 19th century, often transcribing landscape paintings within a loose elliptical shape or following the forms of trees, architecture and terrain [**9**].

Although mostly small in size, the vignette echoes human perception in two ways, as opposed to the strict rectangular frame: by suggesting that forms only materialise through focused attention on a discrete area of a scene; and also by coming closer to the fuzzily ovoid cone of human vision, as Merleau-Ponty writes: 'Our visual field is not neatly cut out of our objective world, and is not a fragment with sharp edges like the landscape framed by the window.'[24] Yet Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology suggests that vision is an imagined continuum, becoming less distinct, yet no less concrete in the imagination, beyond the ocular cone: 'We see as far as our hold on things extends, far beyond the zone of clear vision, and even

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[23] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Review of *The Fine Arts in their Origin, their True Nature and Best Application*, by J.G.Sulzer (1772), trans. Timothy J. Chamberlain, *Eighteenth Century German Criticism* (Continuum, 1992), p.177.

[24] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (Routledge Classics, 2002), p.323.

10 Île Flottante (floating island) dessert served at Chez Clement, Paris.

11 **Jake and Dinos Chapman**, *Disasters of War* (1993).

12 'Willow Nankin' Chinese porcelain (1775-79).

behind us. When we reach the limits of the visual field, we do not pass from vision to non-vision: the gramophone playing in the next room, and not expressly seen by me, still counts in my visual field.'[25] So what about the vignette's fading into nothingness?

Vignettes present dream-like floating islands [**10**], dislocated from the habitual frame-as-window metaphor honed by linear perspective and the photographic lens. They seem closer to the history of sculpture; all those isolated figurines from ancient cultures in the museum (which might have once adorned a shrine), ships in bottles, bonsai trees, and snow domes [**11**]. And, perhaps most consistently, vignettes have been used in ceramic decoration since ancient times, across many cultures [**12**].

*Everglade* (2003) by Marion Coutts brings the landscape vignette to the screen in a ten minute looped video installation. Mirroring the vignette's diminutive scale, the screen for display is an unexceptional, collapsible, freestanding model, redolent of Super 8 home movie presentations or educational slide shows. Equally, the projector stand is a folding one, so together they suggest a temporary staging of a film projection within an interior space [**13**].

The itinerancy of the staging mirrors the journeying series of images that the viewer is presented with. Between extended periods where the screen is a blank whiteness, landscape vignettes slowly fade into view as if appearing out of mist [**14**, **15**, **16**]. They are scenes of parkland, reminiscent of landscapes in the pastoral mode – modern-day Arcadian scenes of idealised natural settings.[26] In many of the scenes figures can be observed from a distance, sitting on benches or walking – never close enough to bestow an identity on the person, beyond perhaps their gender and very approximate age.

What is astonishing is the fact there is movement – not only the figures, but also the shimmer of rustling leaves in the wind, and, more dramatically, a scene where the mid-afternoon sunlight is dramatically darkened by a passing cloud. It is as if the viewer is watching a film for the first time, as the vignette form seems entirely attached to the small still image. *Everglade* brings into weird proximity two opposing forms of mediation with which the viewer is accustomed: the motionless vignette and the moving picture, as Ian Hunt observes:

> Everglade effectively unlocks a naivety lurking in our response. We are familiar with the conventions of still and moving images, but by a simple trick of combining the two, the artist endows these landscape compositions with life, enabling them to become pictures that move.[27]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] *Everglade* was filmed in Richmond Park.

[27] Ian Hunt, *To be continued...* British Council/Hippolyte Photographic Gallery, Helsinki Kunsthalle 2005 (www.marioncoutts.com/texts.html)

13 **Marion Coutts**, *Everglade* (2003).
Installation with free-standing projection screen, projector, projector stand, DVD player, 10 minute loop.

14 **Marion Coutts**, *Everglade* (2003), screen shot.

15 **Marion Coutts**, *Everglade* (2003), screen shots.

16 **Marion Coutts**, *Everglade* (2003), screen shot.

17 The biospheres on the space ship Valley Forge, *Silent Running* (1972), dir. Douglas Trumbull (Universal Pictures)

The landscape has been enchanted into life through the simple, yet painstaking, process of neatly cutting out shapes, following the treetops, and carefully chosen and varying ellipses of foreground. These ellipsoid shapes generate a perception of receding space more akin to the circles of plates in still lifes, rather than the deep perspective of landscape. It is clear that these are real scenes, filmed with a video camera, yet they constantly insist on their being seen as isolated and floating worlds-in-miniature; unreachable fantasy islands, set adrift in the screen's white sea of fog. They are both objects and landscapes, their Elysian qualities heightened by their looped temporal containment within an inaccessible screen projection.

Here, two artistic formations of space are mixed together: landscape and the still life – profoundly challenging relative notions of far and near. The scenes function like fading memories of place contained within the interior space of the mind. Part of this effect is due to the absence of weather, as the sky has been eliminated from view. The audience is protected from any immersive sense of being part of the scene. Yet also, the impression is one of uncanny proximity, as if it is possible to grasp or hold on to the landscape-as-object, as if it is a miniature diorama in a museum display case – just as the viewer can easily touch the screen and circle behind it.

*Everglade* functions as an example of *screen as (replacer of) landscape*, with its lecture or slide show format suggesting that the depicted scenes are fading memories of a lost landscape that might be presented to school children of the future. A filmic reference could be *Silent Running* (1972) [17], where samples of Earth's last remaining natural habitats are blasted into space and saved from destruction by Freeman Lowell and his robot friends, a nightmarish possible future made more real by the existence of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway. *Everglade's* scenes work as similar biospheres: logical extrapolations of the notion of the park, the idealised landscape reduced to an electronically encapsulated vestige.

The endless ten-minute loop of a limited number of scenes, with no beginning or end, is encoded into the supposedly eternal, perfect, and airless, circuitry of the digital. As opposed to analogue film, no scratches or dust will compromise the image over time. Instead of the clatter of the film projector, with rotating spools and moving reel of film, the data projector simply emits a quiet and constant breath of electrically heated air. In this way the digital medium interacts with the physical space, a constant sigh, a warm and gentle zephyr, akin to the interminably pleasant atmosphere permeating the unreachable park.

*Everglade* reveals the hermetically sealed workings of the *screen as (subliminal replacer of) landscape* – an enthralling illusion of absolute control over, and containment of nature, masked as benevolence and serenity. The shadow of the passing cloud darkens the idyll, troubling its eternal repose, a suppressed memory of exterior, elemental forces – and internal, psychological ones.

**18** Claude mirror view of Tintern from the Devil's Pulpit, www.panoramio.com/photo/18296199.

**19** LCD viewfinder on a video camera.

> Is there a new logic to vision as our windows, frames, screens are ever more fractured and virtually multiplied? Which technologies will break through the frame and have us climb through the virtual window? And which will have us stay fixed – nose to the glass (or as the French say about window-shopping, *lecher les vitrines*, 'to lick the windows') – in front of the windows, caught in the hold of an image, framed in display?[28]

The Claude glass or Claude mirror was a small mirror used by artists and other appreciators of the picturesque to frame a landscape [**18**]. It was named after Claude Lorrain, the painter with the greatest influence over the development of the picturesque movement in England in the late 18th century – landscape gardeners such as Humphrey Repton and painters like William Gilpin. In his essays, Gilpin wrote at length about the fusing together of notions of the sublime and the beautiful in the construction and appreciation of a scene, insisting that: '*Sublimity alone* cannot make an object *picturesque*. However grand the mountain, or the rock may be, it has no claim to this epithet, unless its form, its colour, or its accompaniments have *some degree of beauty*.'[29] The Claude mirror functioned to bring together sublime and beautiful conceptions of landscape through processes of diminution. Viewers would effectively turn away from the imposing sight of actual landscape, and due to being slightly convex, the Claude mirror would snugly contain dramatic topographic features within its frame. Being tinted black, it would attenuate the brightness of daylight to values more akin to the muted tones of painting.[30] As Thomas West, a proponent of picturesque sight-seeing instructs, the Claude mirror tames the overwhelming scale of landscape objects, it 'removes them to a due distance, and shows them in the soft colours of nature, and in the most regular perspective the eye can perceive, or science demonstrate.'[31] The Claude mirror achieved, in very portable form, something akin to the camera obscura in terms of mediating direct observation with an apparatus. Yet instead of projecting a large inverted image onto a screen, the image is a mirrored reversal; instead of being amenable to use by the painter for transcribing information, the scene is to be contemplated as a framed, miniaturised entirety.

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[28] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. 241-242.

[29] William Gilpin, *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (1792). Reprinted in *Art in Theory: 1648-1815* (Blackwell Publishing, 2000), pp. 860-861. [The three instances of the word 'its' in this passage are spelt 'it's' in the Blackwell text].

[30] The black tint of the mirror is discussed in the clearing Secret Garden.

[31] Thomas West, *A Guide to the Lakes, in Cumberland, Westmoorland, and Lancashire* (Richardson, Robson and Pennington, 1789), p. 12.

**20** **Emma Hart**, *Lost* (2009-11), a looped 19min HD video installation, video stills.

The technical history of photographic cameras furthered distinctions between these two devices for contemplating landscape at a mediated distance. Ground glass plates used to frame and focus in large format photography follows the camera obscura by projecting an inverted image. Twin lens reflex cameras offer something closer to the Claude mirror as the photographer frames the reversed view looking down into the ground glass viewfinder. These are old camera technologies, largely replaced by single lens reflex cameras during the mid to late twentieth century with their optical viewfinders: single lens reflex systems or fixed parallel lenses. With the optical viewfinder the photographer or filmmaker becomes the apparatus in the sense of Christopher Isherwood's famous 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.'[32] The camera is an extension of the eye. The photograph is taken as if by a blink.

With the advent of digital photography, the Claude mirror has returned in the sense that the LCD viewfinder shares the same proportions. The display becomes a prosthetic or autonomous eye, generating a miniaturised movie – a real-time representation detached from the direct line of human sight [**19**].[33]

With Emma Hart's looped 19 minute video installation *Lost* (2009-11) [**20**] the video camera becomes a participant in a journey of discovery. The diminutive body of the camera is used to access spaces beyond the range of human vision, with the facility of the zoom lens enabling the identification of lost items dwelling in the recesses of the domestic interior – the narrow spaces under cupboards or behind radiators. That the camera records is a supplementary function, superseded by its live use as visual aid, as Hart verbally guides her accomplice (within whose house the survey is taking place), with the aid of a torch, to reach in and grasp hold of long-lost objects found amidst the junk and detritus under the sofa or sideboard.

Yet this prosaic narrative is superseded by a visual spectacle distantly akin to Gilpin's popularising of picturesque travel, where beauty is pursued 'in every shape; through nature, through art; and all its various arrangements in form, and colour; admiring it in the grandest objects, and not rejecting it in the humblest.'[34] With a simple, yet revolutionary, display strategy, Hart redeems the abject landscape of neglected objects closer to the sublime by displaying the humble Claude-mirror-viewfinder image as a wall-scale projection. The audience is forced to view the screen at a distance of just a meter or so, in a narrow corridor of space [**21**]. Their

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[32] Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 1.

[33] I have been surprised to find only one reference to this association between digital camera displays and the Claude mirror: "I was struck by the similarity to viewing images on the camera's ground glass, viewfinder or today's LCD screens. In fact, it was this connection – between the Claude Glass and my first digital camera, a Nikon 900, that propelled me to further investigate this period of time and its rich and complex social and cultural underpinnings." Darryl Baird (2005), www.repicture.info/blog/repictureblog.html

[34] William Gilpin, *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (1792). Reprinted in *Art in Theory: 1648-1815* (Blackwell Publishing, 2000), p. 862.

**21** Installation shots of *Lost* at Cell Project Space, London 2011.

**22** Illustration for Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, Édouard Riou (1864).

viewpoint becomes that of Tom Thumb or the Incredible Shrinking Man. Outmoded commodities and domestic detritus gain the immersive scale of an IMAX movie seen from the front row, 'nose to the glass'[35] of an unconventional shop display of products turned into things. The possibility for an itinerary of meaningful objects is abstracted out of range as the viewer is locked into the gaze of the automated camera, its lens focusing arbitrarily on things at the centre of its field of view, within a deep recessional space.

*Lost* reveals a subterranean or submarine world, the footage being reminiscent of cave exploration or the deep sea – worlds that exist in a permanent night. The landscapes are an alien network of vast caves; the camera's passing through them akin to Jules Verne's A Journey to the Centre of the Earth (1864) [**22**]. The prosaically mundane and the mythological collide, as the giant searching hand becomes a strange monstrous form, clumsily disturbing the natural order – the arbitrary accumulation and sedimentation of things, fragments and particles over unfathomable eons. The moments of recognition dispel the reverie of pristine abjection, which is the driving pictorial fascination, of a secret, quasi-natural world illuminated.

The underbelly of the domestic interior speaks of the excesses of consumer capitalism and its generation of waste, highlighted by the camera's enlargement and estrangement of all these myriad things in various stages of neglect or decomposition, in amorphous, monumentalising, magnified detail. These dark recesses are psychologically exterior to the functioning household. They are the childhood location for monsters under the bed, and early experiences of the uncanny – the familiar made strange. The surrealists were attracted to the auratic power of the outmoded object – to items not yet elevated to the value of the antique, nor quite yet consigned to the rubbish dump. Their celebrated trawling of flea markets for things that have lost their functional or aesthetic value, transfigured to a more primal reverence, as Hal Foster explains:

> Contrary to auratic experience, the human dimension remains forgotten in commodity fetishism; it may be the most profound form of this forgetting. And yet this forgetting is also crucial to aura: it is what renders auratic any outmoded image that retains a human dimension. For when such an image returns to the present it does so as an uncanny reminder of a time before alienation. Such an image looks at us across the distance of this alienation, but, because it is still part of us or we part of it, it can look at us, as it were, in the eye.[36]

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[35] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. 242. Full quotation at the beginning of the chapter Prospect.

[36] Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (MIT Press, 1993), p. 197.

The camera's viewfinder diminishes 'the distance of this alienation' through being used as a searching tool, simply helping to recover things that have been lost. With its use simply as reconnaissance vehicle, the camera unwittingly records images that are sympathetic with the things being navigated around – for the camera is one with them and their landscape. Its gaze has a fugitive integrity, an unflinching, yet somehow troubled, disinterestedness. It engenders the perception of a being made of prosthetic composites, with the hands and eyes of intermediaries. It presents the otherness of cinema's separate parts (tracking, panning, zooming, focusing, exposure, sound, etc.), deconstructed and re-integrated from the inside as a fumbling newborn organo-technological hybrid, interacting with yet-to-be-named, yet-to-be-distanced things.

Donna Haraway describes the modern world as an 'integrated circuit,' in which we are all 'chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology.'[37] She continues:

> It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices. ... There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic.[38]

The genres of still life and landscape are conflated in *Lost*, just as they remain undifferentiated for the infant, as an originating sense of space (or spatiality) is innate, and extends from what can be reached by the hands, before being able to focus the eyes or move the body, as Yi-Fu Tuan explains:

> Long before the infant's eyes can focus on a small object and discern its shape his hands will have grasped it and known its physical properties through touch. ... The infant does posses an innate capacity to recognise the rough three-dimensionality of things, their constancy of size and shape, and the distinction between far and near, but the recognition operates within a highly circumscribed field compared with that of a mobile toddler.[39]

Infant space exploration and discovery is driven more by what can be felt, rather than what can be seen, let alone recognised, across the range of depths that are within reach. *Lost* screens a simulation of this groped-for primal landscape,

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[37] Donna Haraway, *An Ironic Dream of a Common Language for Women in the Integrated Circuit*, in *Philosophy of Technology: the technological condition: an anthology*, edited by Robert C. Scharff and Val Dusek (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), pp.442-443. Originally appearing in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge and Institute for Social Research and Education, 1991).

[38] Donna Harraway, ibid.

[39] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 1977), pp. 20-22.

preceding the differentiations between the genres of still life and landscape, or interior and exterior spaces. To paraphrase Haraway, there is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of still life and landscape, of culture and nature.

Depth of field is a visual phenomenon resulting from the varying dilation of the pupils of the eyes and their lens's focused projection of light onto the retinal surface. The wider the pupil, the shallower the depth of field, meaning that across the range of distances a narrower band of objects resolve into focus. The adjustable aperture of a camera lens offers the same effect, either automatically or selectively, onto celluloid or the electronic image sensor.

The eyes' depth of field remains largely subliminal, as they adjust from focusing on things close at hand, raindrops on glass say, to an advertising billboard further away, out of the window of the bus. In part, this lack of awareness of depth of field is due to the visual doubling of objects outside of the convergent (parallax) lines of binocular vision, but it is more to do with the focusing of attention on one particular object to the exclusion of others in the field of view, and the virtually instantaneous adjustment of the eyes' focal length along with the mind's when attention moves.[40]

Photographers and filmmakers through creative choice use shallow depth of field to bring an object into sharper focus between a background and foreground that are out of focus. The effect on the image can offer a sense of heightened attention to the subject. The intensification of focus within a narrow zone is akin to the choice of pictorial framing facilitated by the telephoto lens – one that may diverge widely from human perception, yet not imaginative projection. Indeed, in film, varying depth of field has been used creatively in similar ways to the zoom lens, to move attention from things close at hand to objects in the distance. The narrative potential of this should not need examples, for the film viewer, as with zooming effects, has become accustomed to its use – pulling focus (and human attention) from a character at the back of a room to an object on the coffee table in the foreground.

Guy Sherwin's nine-minute 16mm black and white film *Filter Beds* (1998) [**23**, **24**, **25**], plays with extremely shallow depth of field, ranging from apparent close proximity to the far distance. This is not in a simple series of one-way trips for the viewer's attention from near to far, or far to near, but in a mesmeric dance, back and forth between objects or surfaces that are continuously coming in and out of focus.

The film was shot at the site of the disused Middlesex Filter Beds in East London. It gives the impression of being filmed on a particular day in one location,

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[40] This is why 3D images or films can never replicate physiological perception of depth, as these technologies often purport to. For the lens of the eye is constantly focused on the flat surface of the screen – it doesn't have to adjust from near to far, even if the camera lens is doing so, along with binocular vision. Watching old-fangled 2D films, binocular vision and focus remain happily coincident.

immersed in a thicket of shrubs, trees and reeds, looking out across the lake surface of the flooded filter beds, or looking up towards the sky laced with telegraph wires and passing commercial aircraft. An atmospheric soundtrack, made from location recordings and other sources, sharpens the sense of continuity, offering a feeling of real-time filming, a mesh of fleeting textures and atmospheric events. Yet *Filter Beds* is anything but a straightforward filming and recording of landscape, for the apparent continuity is incessantly, yet subtly, challenged by disorientations, not caused by the camera panning, tracking or zooming, or through a montage of edited cuts, but by drastic movements of the shallow depth of field, nebulously mixed with dissolves to new scenes.[41]

The film briefly opens with a light-grey field of swirling 16mm film grain before the camera focuses on a small twig in the foreground, with the fuzzy shapes of slightly larger branches behind. After the lens 'moves' to focus on these other forms, causing the twig to completely disappear, the focus is pushed further away to land on crisscrossed telegraph wires in the middle-distance, before quickly pulling back through the branches and twig to focus on nothing once more. Out of this noise of film grain the camera fixes on a different formation of wires, then pulls back to reveal the surface of the lake with a few reeds poking up through the water. The telegraph wires appear to be reflected, but perhaps it's a filmic superimposition, as there are no ripples. The next section perhaps confirms the reflection hypothesis as our focus is on a different twig in the foreground. Then attention is moved on to more reeds in the water, and further away again to see the straight lines of wires gently rippling in reflection.

*Filter Beds* builds in this way, moving through layer upon layer of levels and densities of twigs, foliage, branches, water, reeds, and reflected or directly viewed cables, until a plane is seen traversing the sky between telegraph lines. This perceptual play continues to gather pace, as the wind seems to pick up, ruffling the trees and water more. Now in the darker confines of a thicket of trees, a bird on a branch is observed, moving in and out of ranges of focus, and then back to another plane in the sky. As the film progresses, the agitation of branches and the fluctuations of depth of field increase, and the water of the lake erupts into life under a shower of rain. The sounds of aircraft grow louder, as their appearances multiply. The bird seems to miraculously cling to its perch as the branches violently sway around in the wind, before a sudden calm after the storm, as attention is switched between layers of twigs close at hand to a distant aircraft's vapour-trail, slowly dissolving into the swirling grey film grain of a now clear sky.

There seem to be several factors at work in suspending the viewer's disbelief, all adding to a sense of embodied immersion in the landscape (and the material processes of filmmaking), which are not born of technical perfection, but by a fluid interweaving of sounds and images from near to far away.

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[41] It is unclear what is due to pulling focus, or in fact a dissolve between shots. In-camera effects and optical printing techniques are seamlessly combined.

23 **Guy Sherwin**, *Filter Beds* (1998), 16mm black & white film, 9 mins.
Chronological film stills (1-18).

**24** **Guy Sherwin**, *Filter Beds* (1998), 16mm black & white film, 9 mins. Chronological film stills (19-36).

25 **Guy Sherwin**, *Filter Beds* (1998), 16mm black & white film, 9 mins. Chronological film stills (37-45).

26 **Jacob van Ruisdael**, *Marsh in a Forest* (about 1665).

One factor is the handling of the camera, which seems to hover between the fixity of a tripod and the shakiness of the hand-held. This is particularly evident in the frames that include telegraph wires. This slight movement creates a sense of human presence in the gaze of the camera; neither the frantically mobile nor the frozen statue; neither the knowingly subjective nor the technically perfect. This doubt largely remains subliminal, yet as with the other means of suspension, it works to diffuse the incongruence between viewpoints, looking down at reflections or upwards to the sky, in one continuous flow of perceptions and equivalences.

Sherwin actually used a non-standard telephoto lens, most apparent in a sequence where we see the large disc of the sun or moon behind the bird in the thicket.[42] It was 'a 200mm lens designed for a 35mm still camera, which makes it double that for 16mm (i.e. 400mm!).'[43] With such a powerful lens, the tiniest movement of the camera on the tripod is registered, a slight agitation that seems equivalent to a living eye rather than a mechanical one.

Far more profoundly, the use of incredibly shallow depth of field holds the viewer in its thickness. As it fluctuates between near, far, and middle distances, the fuzzy shadows and ghosts of forms previously, or about to become in focus darken or lighten the image. The viewer has a sense of depth far beyond the field in focus at any one time, always aware that some twig or branch could be dangerously close to the eye, graspable by the hand. This engenders a sense of continuing alertness or attention, as if moving about in a thicket – just like the bird. It could be argued that the viewer has the gaze of an animal, either predator or prey, on continual lookout. And also like an animal, not distinguishing between the leaves and branches of nature and the wires and aircraft of technology.

The particular landscape theme of *Filter Beds* has associations with paintings stretching back through art history, perhaps most astonishingly (for their time) some singular works by Jacob van Ruisdael that represent wood and marshland scenes largely devoid of human agency. *Marsh in a Forest* (1665) [**26**] is a good example, showing incredible attention to detail of the distinctive forms of vegetation, from the trees down to grasses and pond plants.[44] Ruisdael's naturalism, along with other 17th century Dutch landscapists, such as Cuyp, broke with the classicism of Claude and Poussin, yet largely remained true to pastoral themes with expansive vistas, including human figures, fields, roads and architecture; inevitably open to narrative and allegorical interpretations, within their more realist approaches to landscape. *Marsh in a Forest* perhaps just provides an existential

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[42] Being unsure as to whether this sequence was shot in daytime or nighttime doesn't seem to matter. Trying to find distinct temporal markers is somehow suspended by the gentle tonal variations between successive shots.

[43] Guy Sherwin's emailed answer to some technical questions, 13th July 2011.

[44] Ruisdael was 'the first Western artist to depict a variety of trees and shrubs which are unequivocally recognisable to the botanist on account of his faithful representation of their shape and characteristic growth.' Seymour Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael – Master of landscape* (Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), p. 4.

27 **Théodore Rousseau**, *The Forest in Winter at Sunset* (1846-67).

28 **Claude Monet**, *Le Pont de Argenteuil* (1875).

metaphor, as a tiny lone figure can be seen on the far bank of the pond, immersed in the wild scene – perhaps an imagined transposition of the artist (or viewer) into the painting.

The Barbizon School painter Théodore Rousseau lived amidst the forest of Fontainebleau. His large canvas *The Forest in Winter at Sunset* (1846-67) [**27**], not exhibited until after his death, presents the dense interior of a marshy forest in characteristically melancholic, twilit tones. As with *Filter Beds*, the density of vegetation makes the sense of depth palpable, if barely penetrable. His expressive use of paint, layer upon layer across the surface, echoes with physical substance the compression of depth in the tangled thicket.

Coming closer to the post-industrial location of *Filter Beds*, many works by the impressionists, especially Pissaro and Monet, occupy marginal natural spaces on the fringes of the city. Akin to the telegraph wires and aircraft in *Filter Beds*, Monet's *le Pont de Argenteuil* (1875) [**28**] shows an aerial communication technology of his day – an elevated railway bridge – over a wild density of grasses, shrubs and trees, which are not only suffocating the waters of the small river out of view, but seem to threaten the bridge's painted structural integrity.

Of course, *Filter Beds* is a film, not a painting. Yet Sherwin's use of shallow depth of field seems akin to the shallow thickness of paint. It's as if through the fluid motion from near to far the film medium is travelling through layered strata of matter, more through a microscope than a telephoto lens.[45]

The environmentalist Marion Shoard coined the term 'edgelands' to describe 'the interfacial interzone between urban and rural.'[46] *Filter Beds* offers a filmic interaction with one of these landscapes with an equivalent 'interfacial interzone' between the screen as almost tangible surface and the visceral textures of objects and forms as they come in and out of focus, as if being atomised or condensed, out of or into existence.

The dissolves and cuts mostly occur when the focus is pulled right back to close range, or extended to infinity, when everything appears out of focus, either nebulous close proximity or empty sky. The complete dissolution of forms in the

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[45] This is a curious, paradoxical effect of powerful telephoto lenses. In bringing distant objects near, their relative scales seem compressed into a narrow corridor of space. Two figures that might be many meters apart in terms of depth will appear virtually next to each other if the camera is several hundred meters away when framing and focusing on them, whilst excluding other objects in the range of depths. [I remember marvelling at this watching footage of cricket matches as a child].

[46] 'Much of the special character of interfacial areas arises from the fact that they are not planned and not managed. If the essential feature of the edgelands is that they are untamed, and that they express our own age in being so, then to plan them is to some extent to trample on their essential character.' Marion Shoard, 'Edgelands,' in *Remaking the Landscape* (Profile Books, 2002) (PDF version at www.marionshoard.co.uk), p. 15. 'I did at one time consider calling the film Edge or even Edgelands.' Guy Sherwin's emailed answers to some technical questions, 13th July 2011.

**29** **Guy Sherwin**, *Filter Beds* (1998), scene where cables form a musical stave.

mist of film-grain suggests the screen as a blank receptacle, waiting for objects to appear on its surface. It could be the surface of the retina, or perhaps more so, a mental image-screen that has its own density or thickness – an openness to depth perception, yet also open to reading the emerging and dissolving shapes as existing on the same retinal surface. Everything seems equally proximate – phantom forms and shadows that seem interchangeable.

In one section the telegraph wires briefly make the five lines of a musical stave [**29**], linking two artworks that find resonances in *Filter Beds*: John Cage's 'silent' musical composition *4'33"* (1952), and Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* (1964) [**30**], which projects an 'empty' film – a reel of blank celluloid. Both *Zen for Film* and *4'33"* speak of the impossibility of visual or aural emptiness: the accumulation of dust and scratches on the surface of the film over time, or the heightened awareness of ambient sound.[47]

The rhythmic structure of *Filter Beds* is punctuated by empty fields, fully defocused absences of information of varying luminosity. These are shown to be latent with potential images, redolent of Herman Asselberghs's recent thoughts about *Zen for Film*: 'The white monochrome frame is an image that speaks to the impossibility of the empty image;' the 'white screen renders the invisible visible because it is and remains receptive to all images of the world.'[48] Conversely, the cinema photographs of Hiroshi Sugimoto, such as *Metropolitan* (1993) [**31**], render the visible invisible by taking one single exposure for the whole length of a mainstream film, leaving a glowing rectangle of light – a spectral repository for all the frames of the film, as Anne Friedberg comments: 'The film screen is a surface, a picture plane caught in a cone of light, dark and empty until projected images are caught on its veneer. Despite variations in theater architecture and films projected, what remains – constant and haunting – is the screen.'[49] Sherwin's screen is such a veneer; a moving slice of illusory depth, for which vaporous emptiness is its natural state.

The collaged soundtrack is equally unfocused and atmospheric, with long passages where little can be heard. It commences with the sound of a few drips of water, and slowly introduces other close or distant sounds, variously isolated from the subtle ambience; for instance, the hum of electricity through cables (actually a recording of Sherwin's fridge), the cooing of a wood pigeon, the intrusion of low-flying aircraft through the rustle of trees, a sound like a chainsaw or motorbike, and ending with the chatter of birds as distant aircraft silently traverse the sky. The restraint of these sounds is at odds with the usual imposition of aural amplification within film, usually corresponding to the action. The soundtrack follows its own

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[47] Stemming from Cage's realisation in an anechoic chamber that we always hear something – the blood flowing and the central nervous system.

[48] Herman Asselberghs, 'Beyond the Appearance of Imagelessness: Preliminary Notes on *Zen for Film's* Enchanted Materialism', *Afterall 22* (2009), p. 7.

[49] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. XX

30 **Nam June Paik**, *Zen for Film* (1964), performance version.

31 **Hiroshi Sugimoto**, *Metropolitan* (1993), photograph.

32 **Ma Yuan** (1160-1225),
*Dancing and Singing – Peasants Return from Work*, ink on silk.

intuitive logic: the violent swaying of branches and the shower of rain are not met by a cacophony of noise; and the aircraft get increasingly louder as the film proceeds. Just as the audience's eye's are trained on the surface of the screen, their ears are open to suggestion, in a manner similar to Cage's *4'33"*.[50] The soundtrack ranges across distances, a varying aural depth of field equivalent to, but rarely (and still very selectively) synchronous with the visual one, as Sherwin elaborates: 'Overall I felt there might emerge an interaction or tension between these two kinds of depth dimension, one aural, one visual. In addition to which, not liking the slavish, illustrative or obvious relation between sound and image, I wanted to use sound to extend the image outside the frame to suggest things happening that we can't see.'[51]

Of course, *Filter Beds* is rich with imagery, both visual and aural. Yet it appeals to Zen or Taoist philosophy (as with Cage) in its openness to chance and de-centered focus on the fleeting or transient. In a pictorial sense it bears a strong relation to Chinese or Japanese landscape representations [**32**] with its literal moving between, and dwelling within, formless, empty spaces, as Hubert Damisch observes: 'quite literally, the sky and earth have no place in a Chinese landscape, which is established in between the two ... the sky embraces the landscape with its winds and clouds and the earth animates it with its rivers and rocks, according to the rhythm that accounts for all the metamorphoses of the landscape, and all the reversals and inversions of signs of which it is both the product and the place.[52]

In *Filter Beds* these elemental interactions are not just across the screen's surface, but also through the dimension of depth made tangible – a vaporous medium more than a calibrated range of distances. It's as if the screen is made of translucent paper, receiving the shadows of forms as it 'passes through' the landscape – a *field of depths.*

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[50] In 2003 I attended a performance by bell-ringers of Cage's *4'33"*, staged by the artist Matthew Thompson in a small church (organised Compton Verney Art Gallery). The soundtrack to *Filter Beds* bears a striking resemblance to what the audience heard, with a plane in the distance, the rasp of a lawnmower, and the sounds of swallows.

[51] Guy Sherwin's emailed answer to some technical questions, 13th July 2011.

[52] Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of Cloud: toward a history of painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 219-220. 'A [Chinese] landscapist does not ... simply copy nature; nor does he view it from a particular perspective or place. Rather he is above and beyond the limitations imposed by time and space ... He visualizes that he ... is standing in the mid air and that he can see things far away as well as those nearby ... the perspective rises or falls and as the painted matters are either magnified by closeness or blurred by distance, both the artist and viewer acquired a feeling that they are whirling freely in the mid air.' Zhang Anzhi, *A History of Chinese Painting* (Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, China, 2002), p. 5.

*Filter Beds* makes palpable Jacques Lacan's 'if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen...'[53] His seminars 'Of the Gaze' were greatly influenced by Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception within which perception of depth comes under profound scrutiny: 'What I call depth is in reality a juxtaposition of points, making it comparable to breadth. I am simply badly placed to see it.'[54] Merleau-Ponty argues for the 'originality' of the subjective experience of depth, as something other than simply the conditioned 'knowledge that there is a world of undistortable objects, that my body is standing in front of this world like a mirror and that, like the image in the mirror, the one which is formed on the body screen is exactly proportionate to the interval which separates it from the object.'[55] In one striking example of the divergence of depth perception from the conceptual assumption that it is simply '*breadth seen from the side*'[56] he questions the accuracy of the relative size of objects from near to far in determining distance due to the attachment of relative importance to objects that have been close to hand and loom large in memory: '[I]s not a man *smaller* at two hundred yards than at five yards away? He becomes so if I isolate him from the perceived context and measure his apparent size. Otherwise he is neither smaller nor indeed equal in size: he is anterior to equality and inequality; he is *the same man seen from farther away.*'[57] The synthesis of retinal image, binocular vision, memory of movement, and all the other signs of distance,[58] as well as the conception of a 'world of undistortable objects,' is an ongoing philosophical conundrum for Merleau-Ponty:

> This being simultaneously present in experiences which are nevertheless mutually exclusive, this implication of one in the other, this contraction into one perceptual act of a whole possible process, constitute the originality of depth. It is the dimension in which things or elements of things envelop each other, whereas breadth and height are the dimensions in which they are juxtaposed.[59]

Pulling between varying depths of field dissolves the solidity of objects that would normally occlude ones behind, so that signs of distance are truncated into a tangibly shallow depth of field, which seems to pass through matter. *Filter Beds*

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[53] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), trans. Alan Sheridan (Norton, 1981), p. 97.

[54] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 297.

[55] Ibid., p. 299.

[56] Ibid., p. 297.

[57] Ibid., p. 304

[58] including motion parallax, linear and aerial perspective, interposition of objects, etc. [Wikipedia has a pretty exhaustive list: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Depth_perception]

[59] Ibid., p. 308.

isolates 'a primordial depth ... the thickness of a medium devoid of any thing.'[60] The surface of film grain becomes this medium, an optical filter bed: 'a depth which does not yet operate between objects, which *a fortiori*, does not yet assess the distance between them, and which is simply the opening of perception upon some ghost thing yet scarcely qualified.'[61]

The film weaves together natural and technological forms, an elemental combination of air and water, vegetation and metal (wires, aircraft and film's silver halide). And just as the marginal edgeland setting for *Filter Beds* is a product of nature and technology, the wild and the urban; the camera apparatus miraculously mixes technological vision with an extreme, visceral awareness of human depth perception as something occurring within the apparatus of the eye, as Lacan elaborates:

> That which is light looks at me, and by means of that light in the depths of my eye, something is painted – something that is not simply a constructed relation, the object on which the philosopher lingers – but something that is an impression, the shimmering of a surface that is not, in advance, situated for me in its distance. This is something that introduces ... the depth of field, with all its ambiguity and variability, which is in no way mastered by me. It is rather it that grasps me, solicits me at every moment, and makes of the landscape something other than landscape, something other than what I have called a picture.[62]

*Filter Beds* would seem to make manifest Merleau-Ponty's 'ghost thing' or Lacan's 'painted' or 'shimmering surface.' It materialises on film a usually subliminal proprioceptive sense of the eye's density or translucency. The imagined commingling of retinal and film surfaces engenders an attentive yielding to the fleeting moment, a relinquishing of the self as separate to the world; rejecting the objectifying, empiricist urge to name and measure things, which 'stops the movement in thought, as it empties air of weather...'[63] Natural and technological phenomena, both in the landscape and in the perceiving apparatuses, intertwine within the materiality of film. A link can be made to a child's developing conception of the world, open to finding analogies between culturally undifferentiated forms and forces, augmented by film's 'capacity for capturing the

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[60] Ibid., p. 310.

[61] Ibid., p. 310.

[62] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), trans. Alan Sheridan (Norton, 1981), p. 96.

[63] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 10.

most fleeting of visual impressions of the world.'[64] In Sherwin's later film *Messages* his daughter Maya asks: 'aeroplanes take the blueness out of the sky don't they?"

The last sequence of *Filter Beds* shows just a single telegraph wire and the vapour-trail of an aircraft at high altitude; vectors of human communication and energy consumption; one slicing the picture in two, the other fading into nothingness [**33**]. The viewer has become accustomed to seeing forms dissolving into others, and finally, the realisation is that all has been vapour – transitory figments, agglomerations and densities of black and grey film-grain on clear celluloid. Through *Filter Beds*, technology increasingly interacts with nature, and by filming in black and white the blueness of the sky in the final scene is, of course, absent. Yet paradoxically, this limited, monochromatic screen technology, reawakens a sense of innocence in the viewer's gaze: an embodied sense of being-in-the-world through the material equivalent of being-in-the-film.

> As I contemplate the blue of the sky I am not set over against it as an acosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought, or spread out toward it some idea of blue... I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it thinks itself in me.[65]

As Sean Cubitt argues, citing Stan Brakhage, this is not to propose that film technology can actually return the viewer to a 'prelapsarian vision proper to the young child, a vision whose powers we have lost in the lugubrious descent into verbal language and the need to control, through the organisation of sight, the more frightening aspects of the world.'[66] Yet film, and by extension, other media, can renew vision through 'the marvels of an apparatus autonomous of our scopic regimes'[67] – by which the camera and lens re-educates the eye through revealing their equivalent apparitic subjectivity, conjuring subconscious visual reveries and subliminal ocular aberrations.

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[64] Guy Sherwin discussing his film *Messages*, which uses quotes by his young daughter talking about her perceptions of landscape. Interviewed by Francisco Algarin for Lumière Magazine, 2011.

[65] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ibid., p. 249.

[66] Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (Sage Publications Ltd., 1998), p. 36.

[67] Ibid., p. 37.

**33** **Guy Sherwin**, *Filter Beds* (1998), closing scene.

In the nineteenth century the experimental studies of Hermann von Helmholtz into physiological optics was a huge influence on painters. Through examining the eye's responses to varying visual stimuli he gave advice to painters not to try and copy reality, something impossible with the relatively subdued tonal range of paint, but to perform a 'translation of [their] impression into another scale of sensitiveness, which belongs to a different degree of impressibility of the observing eye.'[68] Within his study of the Claude mirror, Arnaud Maillet elaborates:

> [T]he brightness of a sheet of paper, even in full sunlight, cannot equal the luminosity of the sun itself. On the other hand, the human eye is sensitive to the relations between different levels of brightness; these are therefore experienced not absolutely but relatively. The artist must then seek to produce on the eye of the spectator of average sensitivity the dazzling light of the sun as well as the repose of moonlight.[69]

The black tint of the Claude mirror 'enables one to reduce natural light, the last obstacle to perfecting the illusion of the spectacle of nature understood as a painting.'[70] It goes without saying that paint can never have the brightness of sunlight, although Claude Lorrain perhaps came closest to performing a miracle, for example in *Tobie et l'ange* (1663) [**34**]. Yet it is less often appreciated that painted blackness doesn't share this limitation. The subtly modulated blackness in Arkhip Kuindzhi's *Moonlit Night on the Dniepr* (1880) [**35**] would seem to equal the barely perceptible murk of a landscape at night, especially given the attenuated brightness of the moon compared to the sun.

Before painting, drawing, printing, or photographically developing, paper is white and canvas is primed white. Of course, paper may be tinted or the canvas given a coloured ground, yet whiteness is the quality of these surfaces in their basic conception, before a tonal divergence from this norm is contemplated by the artist, followed by pictorial information. Pictorial nothingness is surely white.

What about the screen though? With the monitor switched off the screen is black. But the projection screen's white (or silver) surface is visible in ambient light, and the monitor may reflect the space in which it is situated. Simply put, in their

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[68] Hermann von Helmholtz, 'The Relation of Optics to Painting' (1871), in *Science and Culture: Popular and Philosophical Essays*, ed. David Cahan (University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 291.

[69] Arnaud Maillet, *The Claude Glass: Use and Meaning of the Black Mirror in Western Art* (Zone Books, 2004), p. 118.

[70] Ibid., p. 140.

34 **Claude Lorrain**, *Tobie et l'ange* (1663).

35 **Arkhip Kuindzhi**, *Moonlit Night on the Dniepr* (1880).

36 **Niamh O'Malley**, *Torch* (2007), Dvd projection, 3min 45sec, Painted Screen, 90 x 160 cm.

basic conceptions, the monitor screen is black, before being switched on, and the projection screen is white (even in the dark), waiting to receive an image.[71]

Niamh O'Malley's *Torch* (2007) [**36**] is a DVD projection work that challenges the unquestioned anomaly of the projection screen's shaded whiteness. Distinctions between two technical apparatuses, a torch and a projector are blurred, together with the imaging surfaces of screen, camera and retina.

On the wall is a black oil painting measuring 90 x 160cm. Within the blackness a small circle of light slowly moves around the surface of the canvas. It is a video projection of a scene where the constant beam of a torch is being shone into the space of an urban garden at night. In its filming, the camera remains fixed as the torch moves around, and lush densities of foliage and flowers are slowly revealed – trees, shrubs and bedding plants [**37**, **38**]. An accumulating picture of a three dimensional space builds as the projected light traverses the rectangle of black. Yet this mental image is weirdly fixed to the surface of the painting, as the circle of light has a constant size, even if its content relates to objects nearer or farther away through the recessional space of the landscape.

Shining a bright torch into a landscape at night is a magical experience: the strange shrinkage of depths engendered by the circle of the beam remaining a constant size to the holder of the torch, whatever the distance to the objects lit; and the flattening of depth accentuated by the reduction of shadows to stark outlines, akin to flash photography. With the projected representation of this scenario, it not only appears to the viewer that the torch is illuminating a garden, but that it is illuminating the surface of the painting, unveiling photo-realistically painted information as its beam of light wanders the canvas. This is heightened by the absence of wind rustling the foliage or branches, so it appears that the torch could be illuminating a still image rather than a physical space. The almost imperceptible movement of forms and shadows maintains the perceptual ambiguity, as the flora and vegetation seems to both spatially recede and float on the screen, with the fathomless blackness of the night beyond. This is most pronounced in the upper reaches, where spindly branches and twigs almost seem to be painting themselves into existence as magic brushstrokes on the black surface.

The perceptual conjoining of different media – torch with projector and painted surface with filmic screen – is uncanny, in the sense that the three-dimensional space of the garden, which the torchlight tends to flatten, is represented by a projection, which in normal circumstances would offer an illusion

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[71] This conundrum could be complicated further by considering the state of media screens in an 'on' state, yet waiting for information. Whiteness is telling of absence with slide or film projections, which illuminate the screen white when running without film. Without a signal, an analogue TV displays background radiation – 'snow.' Absence of information on the digital television, computer monitor or data projector is less easy to determine, as pre-programmed graphic information will inevitably appear – the manufacturer's logo, a sign asking for an input, or the already populated expanse of the computer desktop.

37 **Niamh O'Malley**, *Torch* (2007), Dvd projection, 3min 45sec, Painted Screen, 90 x 160 cm. (film stills).

38 **Niamh O'Malley**, *Torch* (2007), Dvd projection, 3min 45sec, Painted Screen, 90 x 160 cm. (film stills).

of depth. Yet the intermingling of 2D and 3D space is all too familiar, as the ideal of the garden as nature tamed and ordered is two-dimensionally intrinsic to design across cultures, from Islamic pattern to the wallpapers of William Morris, with which in slowly animated form, *Torch* would seem to have an unkempt allegiance.

Installing *Torch* requires a delicate balance between allowing the blackness of the painting on a white wall to retain its links to the gallery space (perhaps the dimmed light of Rothko's chapel), and the need for enough darkness for the projection to be clearly visible. By this token it presents a rethinking of the accustomed polarities between the white cube and black box paradigms for exhibiting paintings and prints on the one hand, and projected videos or films on the other.[72] Indeed, it is the black box space inverted, making it conceptually astonishing that an image can appear in the void of the black screen. Instead of the screen receiving light from the projector, it is as if the painted surface is made of phosphorescing substance; like the rear surface of a giant analogue TV screen, being scanned by beams of electrons. In this way, the torch beam seems to phosphoresce the garden. Its filmed proximity to the receiving 'eye' of the camera means that shadows of superimposed forms are barely there. The vegetation floats on an illusory surface, and in want of a sense of depth the mind imagines this surface to be the same as the one at hand – the black canvas.

The torch's illumination of the foliage and flowers is matched by the projector's illumination of the black canvas – the compromised brightness of the torch simply being perceived as that of a less powerful model than the one actually used in the filming. And, of course, this depends on the brightness of the projector – and the fact that the black paint isn't absolutely black.

The projector becoming torch is not the only slippage between apparatuses. Because the camera remains fixed, its static framing of the blackness is somehow superseded by the sense that the black screen and camera are one and the same surface, being lit by the torch-projector. The black void is shown to contain information, not just the physical garden, but also, up close, the digital matrix of the projector and the camera's photoreceptors. It appears as a substrate for vegetative or painterly life – for resurgent electronically encoded after-images latent in the photosensitive substance of paint.

As Ernst Gombrich notes, when considering perceptual constancy in representational images: 'Every time we meet with an unfamiliar type of transposition, there is a brief moment of shock and a period of adjustment – but it is an adjustment for which the mechanism exists in us.'[73] *Torch* is a heavily mediated work, yet somehow it makes redundant the need for a period of

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[72] A paradigm previously challenged by Structural/Materialist filmmakers in film-performances, such as Annabel Nicolson's *Reel Time* (1973), Malcolm Le Grice's *Castle Two* (1971), and Gill Eatherley's *Aperture Sweep* (1973). See Lucy Reynolds, *Magic Tricks: Shadow Play in British Expanded Cinema* (Afterall 23, 2010).

[73] E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Phaidon Press, 1960), p. 47

adjustment beyond, perhaps, allowing the eyes to become acquainted with a dimmed space – as would happen in a real garden at night. But more than this, the need for a 'mechanism' is dissolved because the projector is the torch, and the camera is the black or retinal screen. The eyes follow the beam of the torch-projector, and because of these apparitic doublings, the eyes become one with them, forming a unity of torch-projector-eyes. Additional to this, the mind's eye, due to the leisureliness and arbitrariness of the torch's movement, becomes analogous both to the camera and screen, an imagined retinal projection surface for after images of a garden that *really* seems to be there, whether the eyes are open or closed, recalling Lacan's 'in the depths of my eye, something is painted ... something that is an impression, the shimmering of a surface that is not, in advance, situated for me in its distance.'[74]

Nature and culture collide in the suburban garden, a less formalised descendent of the picturesque, where 'gardens began to be laid out like images of landscape painters. And in the wake of this reversal, painters began to draw gardens.'[75] O'Malley's nocturnal garden is the blackened, faded, virtually forgotten, painted picturesque of the Claude mirror being ranged over by searchlight. It is a landscape that is made up of afterimages held in the memory of the camera, screen and human mind – a synthesis of surface and depth, technology and nature.

[74] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), trans. Alan Sheridan (Norton, 1981), p. 96.

[75] Arnaud Maillet, Ibid., p. 139.

## Screen

### *Screen as Window*

> Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.[76]

The hi-tech screen threatens to mask an elemental experience of the world with a transparent optical illusion, a virtual window replacing multi-sensory, visceral encounters. The apparently immanent perfection of screen technologies, with their increasingly life-like resolutions, contrast ratios, engulfing scales, and CGI effects (not to mention 3D), threaten complete media absorption, without leaving even a subliminal trace of their material existence. Immaterial, binary information has no surface, being resistant to, though not yet entirely immune from, anomalies or glitches. Representing the screen as a sensible matter, a present technology, despite its increasing transparency, implies a regression into visceral visual forms: physical and temporal marks, visible technological artefacts and apparatuses, with metaphorical and psychological depths. Visceral forms of representation present material and tactile surfaces that offer the viewer flawed equivalents to the vagaries of human perception and environmental forces. For example, the simple anomaly of photographed sunlight having the luminosity of white paper; the swirling meteorology of film grain, analogue video, or digital image compression; or the agglomeration, stratification and erosion of paint on canvas over time.

The paradox is that rather than retreating to a reactionary position, say by using chemical photography or expressionist painting styles, technology must be critiqued using its own forms of sensorial organisation. This presents an uncanny relationship, where the otherness of technology must be extended, defamiliarised and made strange, not embraced unquestioningly. The viewer should be seduced and repulsed at the same time, or more precisely, seduced or repulsed at different proximities to the screen image. Whether projected, printed or painted, our noses should be rubbed in it – before the screen and its agencies fully encode, digest, and absorb us.

> Works of art will acquire a kind of ubiquity.... They will not merely exist in themselves but will exist wherever someone with a certain apparatus happens to be.... Just as water, gas, electricity are brought into our houses from far off

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[76] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1955), trans. W. Lovitt (Harper and Row, 1977), p. 4.

> to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual and auditory images, which will appear and disappear at the simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign. ... I don't know if a philosopher has ever dreamed of a company engaged in the home delivery of Sensory Reality.[77]

Paul Valéry's 'home delivery of Sensory Reality' is effectively with us, and its destination speculated upon by science fiction writers to the point of cliché, as Donna Harraway acknowledges: 'the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.'[78] A technology-driven dystopian future was prophesied by George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (1948), Ray Bradbury's Farenheit 451 (1953) [**1**], and William Gibson's Neuromancer (1984). This sense of foreboding tends to become normalised by Hollywood blockbusters such as The Matrix (1999). The future immediately becomes a cluttered and hackneyed past, as Vivian Sobchack comments: '[Science fiction] space collects and contains the temporal flow of narrative and history as if it were a city dump.'[79]

The Internet has become a similar repository on a world-wide scale, and networked hi-tech computer screens – at work, at leisure, in the workplace, home, handbag or pocket – mask, through spectacle and informational superabundance, the fact that their user-friendly operating systems perhaps should be seen as diminutive extensions of a duplicitous, automated global one.[80]

The digital screen, from the point of view of imaging technology (which has always had an operating system of some kind, be it religious, aesthetic, or socio-economic), is simply the latest, more sophisticated, replacer of analogue television, film, photography, and perspectival painting – a surface for representational projection with the dream of perfect verisimilitude, parodied by René Magritte's *La Condition Humaine* (1933) [**39**], and imitated for the foreseeable future by advertisements for televisions [**40**]. Yet television and data-projection screens –

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[77] Paul Valéry, *The Conquest of Ubiquity* (1928), quoted by Anne Friedberg in *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2003), p.183.

[78] Donna Haraway, *An Ironic Dream of a Common Language for Women in the Integrated Circuit* (1991), published in *Philosophy of Technology: the technological condition: an anthology*, edited by Robert C. Scharff and Val Dusek (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), p.XX.

[79] Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (Ungar, 1987), p. 263.

[80] There are plenty of plausible evangelists for the Internet, and my apparent dystopian outlook is somewhat disingenuous, given the huge amount of useful information gleaned from it in my writing of Screen as Landscape – not to mention its role in facilitating political dissent. But offering a brief summary of its darker side is intended to provide a context for discussing its hi-tech avatar, the screen, which in either utopian or dystopian scenarios is threatening the particularities of other, less transparent – thus more tangible – visual media.

**39** **René Magritte**, *La Condition Humaine* (1933), oil on canvas.

**40** Advertisement for the Samsung LED 7000.

**41** Television advertisement for Virgin Media, 2011

cathode ray, LCD, LED, or Plasma – have recently received scant attention by artists in terms of their particular optical qualities and material presences – themes with which Structural filmmakers tackled through the 1960s and 1970s, such as Kurt Kren, Michael Snow, Malcolm Le Grice, and Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. To summarise, they fore-grounded film's material qualities, and lens and montage-based narrative conventions, through processes of making the camera or optical printing apparatus viscerally present.[81]

The screen's subliminal influence on visual perception and insidious colonisation of the modern interior or the urban landscape has accelerated over the last two decades, especially with the personal computer and the mobile phone, so that they infiltrate virtually all spaces of work and leisure, both public and private – making these distinctions almost redundant [**41**].[82]

With Anne Friedberg's 'virtual window' becoming ever more 'mobile and pervasive'[83] comes the suggestion from Rosalind Krauss that the ubiquity of video art has 'proclaimed the end of medium-specificity. In the age of television... we inhabit a post-medium condition.'[84] And from Friedrich Kittler, on a societal level, that the 'general digitalization of information and channels erases the difference between individual media.'[85] Nam June Paik, the first video artist, celebrated, and to a large part pre-empted, a positive view of the current situation, proclaiming: 'Our life is half natural and half technological. Half-and-half is good. You cannot deny that high-tech is progress. We need it for jobs. Yet if you make only high-

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[81] P. Adams Sitney coined the term Structural Film in his book *Visionary Cinema* (1974). Works by an exponent of Structural film, Guy Sherwin, are featured in the clearings Thicket and Pastoral Idyll. Several other British filmmakers could have easily and appropriately figured in this writing. Chris Welsby and Malcolm Le Grice pioneered filmic engagements with landscape, in terms of foregrounding the materiality of film: its narrative contingency on meteorological incident, for example dictating the motion of the camera apparatus (e.g. Welsby, *Seven Days* (1974)); or manifesting the entropic processes of re-filming, belying the illusion of immersive spectacle (e.g. Le Grice, *Whitchurch Down* (1972)).

[82] 'Our new campaign celebrates the integral role technology plays as part of life today. People are using more services, devices and gadgets more of the time and Virgin Media is helping families lead a limitless digital life. We're enabling the next generation of digital entertainment and putting our brilliant services at the heart of UK homes. With superfast broadband, next generation TV and mobile services, a Virgin Media home is a more exciting place to live.' Richard Larcombe, advertising and sponsorship director at Virgin Media, 2011. http://www.virginmedia.com/information/a-more-exciting-place-to-live-tv-ad.php

[83] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. 87.

[84] Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), p. 31.

[85] Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophone, Film, Typewriter* (October 41, 1986), pp. 101-118.

tech, you make war. So we must have a strong human element to keep modesty and natural life.'[86]

Indeed, the human element of screen technology has become ever-more present. Yet this has been through a subliminal process of manipulating human attention for economic or political ends, confusing distinctions between so-called natural and technological life, as Jonathan Crary notes: 'Television especially, in a variety of forms, emerged as the most pervasive and efficient system for the management of attention, and it has become so fully integrated into social and subjective life that certain kinds of statements about television (for example, about addiction, habit, persuasion, and control) are in a sense unspeakable[.]'[87] He continues:

> Television and the personal computer, even as they are now converging toward a single machinic functioning, are antinomadic procedures that fix and *striate.* They are methods for the management of attention that use partitioning and sedentarization, rendering bodies controllable and useful simultaneously, even as they simulate the illusion of choices and 'interactivity.'[88]

The banal or profound, the fictional or factual – relayed by text, image, sound and video – cohabit the home, or the surface of the screen. Felix Guattari's description of television's ability to contain distracted, wandering, or focused, levels of attention within a unifying frame could just as well apply to the desktop of a user-interface or mobile phone:

> When I watch television, I exist at the intersection 1) of a perpetual fascination provoked by the screen's luminous animation which borders on the hypnotic 2) of a captive relation with the narrative content of the program, associated with a lateral awareness of surrounding events – water boiling on the stove, a child's cry, the telephone... 3) of a world of fantasms occupying my daydreams. My feeling of personal identity is thus pulled in different directions. How can I maintain a relative sense of unicity, despite the diversity of components of subjectivation that pass through me? It's a question of the refrain that fixes me in front of the screen.[89]

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[86] Nam June Paik interviewed by Charlotte Moorman, 'Video, vidiot, videology' in Gregory Battock (ed), *New artists video: a critical anthology*, (EP Dutton, New York 1978).

[87] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (MIT Press, 2001), pp. 71-72

[88] Jonathan Crary, ibid., p. 75.

[89] Felix Guattari, *Chaosmos: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 16-17. Indeed, as I'm writing this on a computer, iTunes is playing some ambient music, an icon is jumping around, saying that I have an email. Yet I had to make a conscious effort to look out of the window to notice that the sun has come out, thereby making me realise that lunchtime has long passed and I might be feeling a bit hungry.

Richard Hamilton's painting *War Games* (1991) [**42**] depicts a television perched on the sideboard of a living room. The scene displayed on its screen is a graphic designer's elevated view of the territories of Iraq and Kuwait at the time of the first gulf war. Brightly coloured tanks and flags signify the assembled forces like pieces in a game of Risk, with an over-sized, fanciful mountain range receding to the horizon.

By painting an illustration from a news program, rather than an actual scene from the war, the painting affirms Paul Virilio's observation that the war (Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm) was the first to be viewed only through censored and distanced military footage or graphic dioramas: 'War henceforth takes place in a stadium, the squared horizon of the screen...'[90]

Rather than painting a careful representation of the optical qualities of television and computer graphics, showing the television set as an insidious part of the domestic interior, the illustrated landscape is rendered in an amateurish gestural style. This is starkly at odds with Hamilton's more familiar use of sophisticated printing and painting techniques, referencing and mimicking the shiny surfaces of domestic appliances and popular culture. The screen is rendered as a painting, an object that would make more visual sense on the wall of the room – an idea given added weight by the television cabinet's curious lack of depth in terms of screen technology in 1991.

*War Games* suggests that television has become just as redundant as painting in being able to communicate the truth. But the painted screen is set within a larger one – the more realistically painted space of the interior. Yet this realism is belied by crudely painted blood, dripping from under the screen. The blood indicates the terrible human cost of the war hidden by the computer graphics. But, even more so, with its cartoon-like crassness, it seems to represent the death of accurate war reportage in the media.[91] *War Games* perhaps demonstrates that painting can actually get closer to presenting the truth of the politics of the situation through its evident fixity as an object. An elephant in the living rooms of the nation is made tangibly manifest – it cannot be channel-surfed away.

*War Games* shows a screen containing a landscape depiction, so could be considered as an example of a *screen as landscape*, within the 'sights' of this writing, so to speak. Yet it is being used as a marker of an outer limit of what this enquiry is aiming to investigate, for the screen is being used as an iconic object, as it would in

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[90] Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light*, trans. Michael Degener (Athlone Press, 2001), p. 41.

[91] Largely unreported post-war estimates of casualties: between 20,000 and 35,000 deaths of (mostly conscripted) Iraqi troops, including the bombing of retreating, mostly conscripted forces on the so-called 'Highway of Death.' Civilian fatalities range from 3,500 directly from bombing, to over 100,000 from other effects of the war. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War

42 **Richard Hamilton**, *Modern Moral Matters, War games* (1991).

43 **Hieronymus Francken (II)**, *Het kabinet van de kunstliefhebber* (17th century).

44 **Mike Silva**, *T.V.* (2010), oil on canvas, 30x40 cm.

an illustration or cartoon (or within much of Paik's work for that matter).[92] It works in this way for Hamilton's overtly political purposes, yet it doesn't examine the visual and metaphorical functioning of the screen, as both object and image, from within its own permeable bounds.[93] Hamilton's television set is contained within the larger frame of the canvas, and also within the history of painting; for pictures within pictures have been around through art history, Vermeer being a refined example of the picture collections depicted by Hieronymus Francken the younger, for example [**43**].

The computer desktop environment echoes this today, where layered 'windows' jostle for attention. In a sense these screen surfaces are populated, just as the land might be – the surface of the earth. But a screenic inflection of landscape implies an immersed being-in-the-screen as equivalent to being-in-the-world, where distinctions between natural, cultural and technological artefacts, and the spaces between them – their frames and depthless surfaces – are dissolved, reconfigured, and re-enmeshed by visual apparatuses and processes: ocular, cortical, and technological.

Mike Silva's painting *T.V.* (2010) [**44**], in unassuming form, presents the viewer with some of these questions. Is the screen object or image? Whether it is on or off, it has to be showing something. Is it some sort of landscape, or just a distorted reflection of the interior?

*Screen as Mesh*

> All painting ... is a process of screening, of generating, testing, adjusting screens. This is true even when the goal is, as it is in abstraction, an achieved surface. The process includes the secondary sense of the word 'screening,' that is, blocking out, in this case as the obscuring of sections of the field in order to hold them temporarily out of the array, or to generate further figures within it.[94]

Edward Hopper's *New York Movie* (1939) [**45**] provides an early glimpse of a motion-picture screen represented in the still medium of painting. Its notional black and white seductions are here revealed in their true pastel tones of grey, caused by the lack of opacity of the film medium of his day, and the effect of

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[92] Some of Nam June Paik's early work is relevant to this enquiry, particularly his *Zen for Film* (1964/1965), which will be discussed later in the chapters Sky and Thicket.

[93] Rather than being overtly political, Screen as Landscape is covertly political, against a hegemonic adversary, which has, paradoxically, facilitated the production of my artworks and this writing. Another study could look into the scarcity of depictions of the cinema or television screen through 20th century painting.

[94] Terry Smith, *Impossible Presence – Surface and Screen in the Photogenic Era*. Ed. Terry Smith (The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 17.

45 **Edward Hopper**, *New York Movie* (1939).

46 **Edward Hopper**, *House at Dusk* (1935), oil on canvas.

47 **Edward Hopper**, *Nighthawks* (1942), oil on canvas.

incident light in the auditorium. The solitary man in the audience is enthralled to the screen, of which just a section can be seen. He is a frozen figure, mentally trapped in the stilled frame of the film, and entirely separate from the contemplative usherette absorbed in her own thoughts – her own moving pictures – as she has probably seen the film dozens of times. *New York Movie* affirms painting as a motion-picture medium, aligning painting to the technologies of modernity, as the viewer's attention, although also seated in the audience, switches between the distanced, abstracted screen drama and the more elusive and mobile one closer at hand. In all painting, this shifting focus is echoed by the viewer's mobile physical relationship to the canvas, between distance and proximity, between the overall picture and its tangible surface of marks made over time.

Hopper's work was informed by photography, perhaps most obviously in its abrupt framing of scenes, especially city streets, e.g. *House at Dusk* (1935) [**46**]. But also this relationship is exhibited more subtly by his arrangement of figures, often appearing as if captured in a photographic moment – a snap shot – as seen with the painted figures in *Nighthawks* (1942) [**47**], as Andrew Benjamin notes: 'the fact that the group consists of anonymous and isolated individuals indicates a definite relation to photography.'[95] With their framing in the window of the diner appearing as a lit-up screen within the less distinctly painted dark surroundings of the street, the painting collapses together conceptions of a photographic film still and the distilled timelessness of painting.[96] Benjamin continues:

> *Nighthawks* depends upon a moment, which, precisely because of its insistent presence, breaks the hold of the moment. Breaks it while holding it in place. The two opposing moments taken together define both the particular form of relationality and the practice of painting. ... This opening up – which takes the moment as its condition of possibility – allows for the inscription of complexity.[97]

Gerhard Richter's later abstract paintings, for example *Abstraktes Bild* (1997) [**48**], reference the photographic obliquely through techniques of blurring and dragging in successive layers – moving, erasing and adding to their surfaces – without referencing a photographic source image. As opposed to his overtly photorealist works, which tend to augment the indexical properties attributable to the photograph as both trace of light and image-object, his abstracts generate a screen-like surface, which holds in dynamic tension the two media, whilst opening

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[95] Andrew Benjamin, *Disclosing Spaces: On Painting,* (Clinamen Press, 2004), p. 97.

[96] This is not to suggest that *Nighthawks* presents an example of a picture-within-a-picture, but more a modulation between types of pictorial media, which doesn't dispel the presence of either.

[97] Ibid., pp. 99-100.

**48** **Gerhard Richter**, *Abstrakte Bild* (1997), oil on aluminum panel, 48 x 55 cm.

**49** **Richard Hamilton**, *Kent State* (1970), screen print.

up the possibility of other inter-medial spaces.[98] As Peter Osborne remarks: 'they are still 'photo paintings,' but in an ontologically deeper sense than the phrase conveys when used as a designation for the earlier, more particularistically 'photo-based' work – a sense which is compatible with a compositional productivity, which places them closer to the video image and the digital image than the photographic image...'[99] The distinctiveness of painting and photography, and their proximity to the screen image, does not suggest a supplanting of one media by another, but what Benjamin usefully describes as the *after-effect*:

> On the one hand [the] concern is to position the question of painting as one that has to be posed after photography, though equally it turns this position around such that any interpretation of contemporary photography has to position it as occurring 'after' painting. One occurs after the other. In order to highlight the reciprocity involved, this relation will be provisionally identified as the *after-effect*.[100]

One of the primary aims of Screen as Landscape is to locate examples of artworks that in various ways present *after-effect* relations between media: reciprocities and exchanges between the hand-made, static, and material media of painting and printmaking, and the mechanised, immaterial surfaces of the filmic, electronic, or digital image. Benjamin's *after-effect* has the virtue of being reciprocal and mutual, not bound to a sense of historical development – in which one medium absorbs and makes obsolete an older one.[101] All media can reveal the limitations and paradoxes of visual perception, out of which metaphors for human experiences of being-in-the-world through being-in-the-medium can emerge.

Richard Hamilton's screen print *Kent State* (1970) [**49**] comes far closer to the ambit of this enquiry. It depicts a student victim of the shootings by the National

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[98] Andrew Benjamin: 'The blur is a technique. And yet it is only present as a technique because of the relationship between photography and painting. ... One of the most straightforward ways in which the project of painting can continue is by avowing and then working through its relation to other media. Rather than maintaining a definition that is given by the exhaustive work of negation, it is possible to see painting as working with the recognition of relation, without letting relationality determine the work to the point that it cannot incorporate – incorporate and thus work with – relations.' Ibid., p. 102.

[99] Peter Osborne, *Abstract Images: Sign, Image, and Aesthetic in Gerhard Richter's Painting*, (October, 1998), reprinted in *Gerhard Richter*, Ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (MIT, 2009), p. 109.

[100] Andrew Benjamin, Ibid, p.9.

[101] Conversely, in relation to Benjamin's *after-effect*: 'Adobe® After Effects® CS5.5 software is the industry-leading solution for creating sophisticated motion graphics and cinematic visual effects. Transform moving images for delivery to theaters, living rooms, personal computers, and mobile devices.' www.adobe.com/products/aftereffects.

Guard at an anti-Vietnam war protest at Kent State University, Ohio, in May 1970. The televisual qualities of the image are brought to the fore in three ways: the curved frame of the TV inside the black frame of the picture; the suggestion of movement between two superimposed frames of video; and the shimmering luminescence of the print. But the print offers more than a mere facsimile, for the matrix of the televisual image is translated to print object through the agency of the fabric grid of the silk-screen. Television's accustomed visual quality, the electronic evanescence of a cathode-ray display, is made material and tactile by an equivalent matrix. Poignantly, this tactility translates across from paper surface to the blood-soaked fabric on the victim's arm. It echoes the photomechanical process by which the image was transferred to paper, so lifts the blood from behind the screen to commingle with the ink on the surface of the print – within the range of the viewer's touch.

*Screen as Matrix*

> In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature.[102]

Screens are protective barriers from the elements, but also carriers of substances and light. The use of the word to describe a surface for the projection of an image is not restricted to the cinematic or televisual. Screen-printing was developed in China, the meshed screen mediating between the creation of a representation and its manifestation as a print. Tapestry happens on a fabric grid, as does the craft of weaving. Industrial loom technology's digitally encoded patterns influenced the conception of Babbage's Analytic Engine, forerunner to today's computers.[103] If 'the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art,' then it has a long history, stretching back beyond modernist painting to which Rosalind Krauss focused her attention. Yet along with the appearance of the grid in cartography and textiles (and thereby the canvas support for painting), it has re-emerged as the hegemonic matrix of every digital screen.

Structural filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s fore-grounded the material of film and its apparatuses (including the screen) to critique the anaesthetising hegemony of mainstream culture, accentuating and deconstructing Marshall McLuhan's aphorism, 'the medium is the message.' In a similar way, the survey of art works presented here question the present-day situation. This is not a simple prospect, for digital information is immaterial and encoded, requiring an invisible,

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[102] R. Krauss, 'Grids,' in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Popular Myths* (MIT Press, 1979).

[103] As discussed in the clearing Mists.

electronic combination of hardware and software in order to be presented on screen. So a structural or materialist approach must somehow get inside this hermetic system, questioning human-technology alterity relations, where technology begins to supplant the world.[104] Objects are manifested that make the interface between the human imagination and technology tangible through rendering the screen apprehensible by slowing it down, countering Virilio's 'light of speed,' where now 'it seems we live less in our own habitat (its field having practically disappeared) than in the habit of velocity; assimilated to reality, its verisimilitude alienates us to the point of eliminating the optical effect of celerity, thereby normalizing the blurring of perception caused by acceleration.'[105]

'As the idea of a natural fit between matter and form declines,' Lyotard writes, 'the aim for the arts, especially of painting and music, can only be that of approaching matter. Which means approaching presence without recourse to the means of presentation.'[106] As screen interfaces become the pervasive form of presentation, where is the nuance and timbre of matter? Disregarding 'the means of presentation,' would seem impossible for art attempting to interrogate the screen. The screen must be animated, in the sense that life and spirit must be breathed into it. This doesn't mean as simulated, hyper-real spectacle, but more that the screen's matrix must be treated as a maternal one (the womb), from which the human subject should aim to become estranged.[107]

> When we first reach forward and grasp things, we see only the benefits of our standardization, only the positive side of greater clarity and utility. It is difficult to accept the paradox that no matter how alluring, every gain we make also implies a lost possibility. The loss is especially devastating to those living in the technological world, for here they enjoy everything conveniently at their disposal – everything, that is, except the playful process of discovery itself.[108]

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[104] See the chapter Estrangement for an explanation of alterity relations to technology.

[105] Paul Virilio, *Negative Horizon* (1984), trans. Michael Degener (Continuum, 2005), p. 116.

[106] Jean-François Lyotard, *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[107] The reader will be put in mind of *The Matrix* films and note how they played with definitions of the 'matrix' as an illusion generating computer network, with humanity contained within artificial wombs.

[108] Michael H. Heim, 'Heidegger and McLuhan *and* The Essence of Virtual Reality,' *Philosophy of Technology* (Blackwell, 2003), p. 545.

## Mists

With Helen Sear's *Inside the View* series [**50-56**] landscapes are suspended within the ideal plane of the digital matrix as a vaporous intertwining of perspectival views and surface artefacts.

Over several years, friends or strangers were photographed in various landscape settings, in locations found by chance during trips through Europe, or in the Black Mountains and Wye Valley near her home in Wales. She photographed their heads and shoulders from behind, looking out across ostensibly picturesque landscapes – vantage points appealing to romantic sensibilities.[109] During the same period she took numerous photographs of a wide variety of scenes without figures, including woodland, meadows, paths, and roads. *Inside the View* combines these two forms of landscape photograph – ones with a figure and ones without – into a semi-transparent composite. From a distance they present a curious juxtaposition of landscape genres: German Romanticism, impressionist atmospherics, symbolist colour, and photographic realism. In all the works, a coherent view of a single landscape seems to be emerging or dissolving, as super-natural mixes of geographical features and sunlight coming from different directions lends the images an air of fairytale fantasy.

In each work there seems to be a third image or superimposition in play: the apparently dried and darker grass in the foreground of *Inside the View 9* [**51**]; the trees framing the head in *Inside the View 13* [**53**]; or the autumnal trees in the centre of *Inside the View 10* [**52**]. It's not that these appear as collaged additions to the scenes, but more that they seem to contradict the fact that everything is a composite, revealing an automatic desire to read at least one part of each image as true, as representative of one of the actual landscapes. The composite image is the dominant one, yet ambiguity remains, as the pictorial integrity of the two source pictures is an insistent possibility.[110]

Even at a distance it is clear that the merging of the photographs is not simply the result of one image being made semi-transparent. A lace-like structure becomes more visible at closer proximity, containing the pictorial information of one of the photographs. One landscape has actually been selectively erased with a fine line

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[109] Indeed, the Wye Valley was a formative picturesque location for William Gilpin and William Wordsworth.

[110] 'When we say that a painting or situation is ambiguous, we invest the painting or the situation with that characteristic. In fact, there is no ambiguity there but the possibility of multiple interpretations projected by the brain onto the painting. Each of these projections is a brain reality and each has a validity and a certainty for a limited time. Much the same is true of the term 'illusory,' which implies that there is a departure from the physically determined reality. This fails to take into account that, for the brain, the only reality is brain reality.' Semir Zeki, *Splendours and Miseries of the Brain* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 89.

**50** **Helen Sear**, *Inside the View 1* (2004-8), photograph, 34 x 34 cm.

**51** **Helen Sear**, *Inside the View 9* (2004-8), photograph, 34 x 34 cm.

52 **Helen Sear**, *Inside the View 10* (2004-8), photograph, 34 x 34 cm.

53 **Helen Sear**, *Inside the View 13* (2004-8), photograph, 34 x 34 cm.

54 **Helen Sear**, *Inside the View 17* (2004-8), photograph, 34 x 34 cm.

55 **Helen Sear**, *Inside the View 20* (2004-8), photograph, 34 x 34 cm.

56 **Helen Sear**, *Inside the View 21* (2004-8), photograph, 34 x 34 cm.

57 **Helen Sear**, *Inside the View 21* (2004-8), detail.

drawn on a digital drawing tablet. By slowly filling the screen with a hand-drawn (though digitally interpolated) net of looping marks, Sear has partially unveiled – or more so, 'veiled' – another landscape as a foreground mesh through which the original landscape is seen [**57**].

These veil-like structures are suggestive of many things, hand or machine made, or naturally occurring: lace or crochet, the filigree lines of a rotted leaf, an insect's wing, or perhaps the lined texture of human skin. Sear's nets are neither a uniform pattern nor a random distribution of elements. The authorial marks of her drawing have organic qualities that are tending towards pattern – concentric circles and waves, sometimes with mirrored symmetries, each time unique to the particular pair of images being woven together. Importantly, the veils create the illusion of an undulating surface rather than flat uniformity. They suggest movement: perhaps a sense of multiplying cells or a film of bubbles.

Within all the nets or veils there are larger forms, appearing as filled gaps within their structure. These appear darker or lighter than the overall image, depending on the tonal differentiations between the two photographs. These distinctive visual anomalies invite inspection of the intricate surface, working to activate curiosity in their construction. Yet from a distance they also generate both atmospheric and material associations. On the scale of landscape these could include falling snow, confetti, or leaves – even flocks of birds or swarms of flies. In terms of the net as fabric over a surface, they are reminiscent of types of veil that have dots of material woven into them, a mesh used as a screen to capture particles, or perhaps moth holes. This confusion of suggestive qualities, either additions or absences, either intended or entropic, either on the surface or within the landscape, mediate between the two combined scenes, questioning their illusory semi-cohesion as one landscape by interrupting their weirdly contiguous surfaces.

Perhaps most potently they have the appearance of ocular aberrations, the shadow of floaters in the eye's vitreous humour, or the sparkle of tiny bright dots, known as Scheerer's phenomenon. Jonathan Crary discusses these visual anomalies in his exhaustive study of Seurat's work. In reference to Helmholtz's research into physiological optics, he asserts that:

> One of the effects of Helmoltz's widely read work was to undermine with finality any sense of the eye as a transparent organ and to put forth a comprehensive account of human vision in all its anatomical and functional complexity. The eye emerges in this text not only as a marvellous apparatus but as one with built-in aberrations, proneness to error, and inconsistencies in its processing of visual information. Helmholtz emphatically embeds the eye within the thickness and opacity of the body.[111]

[111] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (MIT Press, 2001), p. 215.

Crary sees Seurat's project as a quest for 'alchemical transubstantiation,' between the impressionist and the symbolist, between the 'modernizing quantitive color theory deriving from Chevreul,' and the 'romantic Goethean tradition of expressionistic color.'[112] Although redolent of Caspar David Friedrich's icon of romanticism *Wanderer above the Sea of Mist* (1818) [**58**], with the situating of the *rückenfigur* – a pictorial avatar for the viewer – in the foreground, the fog in Sear's *Inside the View* series is not a separate feature of the landscape as background, but the product of an elemental intermingling.[113] Her figures are suspended in the sea of an illusory mist, their tenuous presence a function of confusions between their locations in two landscapes concurrently. At closer proximity the coherency of the figures disperses, becoming less *inside the view*, and more on the surface of the screen, as the diaphanous outline of the hand-drawn veil takes over perception of competing and coalescing landscape illusions. Instead of an 'alchemical transubstantiation,' between scientific and symbolist colour theories, the transubstantiation would seem to be between the sheer, high-resolution clarity of the landscapes and the delicate trace of human activity within the fabric or matrix of the screen.

Sear's *Inside the View* series finds historical resonance with the intellectual friendship between photography pioneer, Henry Fox Talbot, and Charles Babbage, the inventor of the computer, in the late 1830s. Babbage conceived and constructed his Analytic Engine based on industrial weaving technology, and according to Geoffrey Batchen, 'by early 1836 [he] had adopted Jacquard's system of cards into his plans for a computing Analytic Engine.'[114] Reciprocally, lace was often the subject of Talbot's earliest contact prints, one of which he sent to Babbage [**59**]. In an uncanny echo of *Inside the View*, in the accompanying text to his six volume The Pencil of Nature (1844-46), Talbot describes the equivalent perceptual acceptance of negative and positive images produced by the calotype photographic process, 'black lace being as familiar to the eye as white lace, and the object being only to exhibit the pattern with accuracy.'[115] As Batchen elaborates: 'This is a photograph not so much of lace as of its *patterning*, of its numerical, regular repetitions of smaller geometric units in order to make up a whole. ... Photography involves, in other words, an abstraction of visual data; it's a fledgling form of information culture.[116]

Sear's woven or crocheted lace has no material existence. It is simply deleted information from the encoded, pixellated coordinates of an image suspended in the virtual mesh of the digital matrix. But does this mean that Sear's lace is less or more

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[112] Ibid., p. 226.

[113] The *rückenfigur* is also examined in the clearing Vanishing Point.

[114] Geoffrey Batchen, *Electricity Made Visible.* Ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun & Thomas Keenan (Routledge, 2006), p. 31. [Thanks to Helen Sear for pointing me to this text].

[115] H. Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature,* (1844-46), text with plate XX.

[116] Batchen, Ibid., pp. 29-30.

58 **Caspar David Friedrich**, *Wanderer above the Sea of Mist* (1818).

59 **William Henry Fox Talbot**, *Lace* (1845),
plate XX in The Pencil of Nature (1844-46),
photogenic drawing contact print negative.

60 **Albrecht Dürer**, woodcut from the *Painter's Manual*, 1525.

indexical than a photogram? Damian Sutton challenges some prevailing views that digital photography, through the encoding of data and its manipulability, is somehow less 'real' than a conventional photograph or photogram, which directly traces in silver halide the play of light and shadow:

> Photography's equivalence [across all its forms] is a genus or species embodied in the screen. The screen contains, frames or unifies the world (transparency), or reveals itself by reflecting the expectations of culture (objecthood). ... Yet the mechanics of photography act on behalf of an eye, a window, a *screen*, and representation, acting as a virtual equivalence, clings to the surface of the screen like a patina, an immanence of the thought of photography.[117]

The ethereal presence of the figure in the foreground of the *Inside the View* photographs tends to imply that this image in front of the other landscape. Yet the veil only exists as form, not matter. It is simply missing information from one image, revealing the landscape behind. Unlike Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit, human perception finds it difficult, but not impossible, to assimilate these competing readings of surface and illusion, as Richard Wollheim explained with the term 'twofoldness,' which engenders 'two simultaneous perceptions: one of the pictorial surface, the other of what it represents.'[118] Rather than oscillating, the visible and tangible commingle. This is in regard to painting for Wollheim, yet Sear's photographs would seem to represent the twofold nature of perception in general terms, resonating with Merleau-Ponty's metaphorical chiasm:

> We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible, which is encrusted in it, as, conversely, the tangible itself is not a nothingness of visibility, is not without visual existence. Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world.[119]

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[117] Damian Sutton, 'Real Photography,' *The State of the Real: Aesthetics in the Digital Age* (I.B. Taurus, 2007), p. 171.

[118] 'Looking at a suitably marked surface, we are visually aware at once of the marked surface and of something in front of or behind something else. I call this feature the phenomenology of 'twofoldness.' Originally concerned to define my position in opposition to Gombrich's account, which postulates two alternating perceptions, Now canvas, Now nature, conceived of on the misleading analogy of, Now duck, Now rabbit, I identified twofoldness with two simultaneous perceptions: one of the pictorial surface, the other of what it represents.' Richard Wollheim, *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting*, Ed. Rob van Gerwen (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 19-20.

[119] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Intertwining – the Chiasm,' *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), (Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 134. The chiasm is the site

Intertwining associations with veils, skin, and the aberrations of human sight with hand-drawn, yet digitally immaterial mark making, embeds perception within the screen – an interfacial interzone between illusion and surface, sight and touch, landscape and veil.

That Sear's figures are women can be read as a feminist critique of supposed masculine opticality: the rationalism of scientific Cartesianism; the 'objective' monocular viewer fixed by linear perspective and the lens and all the power relations constructed by this.[120] There's also a link to the predominantly female handicraft of lace making and the veil as item of clothing. The ghostly immaterial presence of quasi-tangible fabric in Sear's images is at play with the invisible fabric, or rigid digital matrix, of her high-resolution photographs. Alberti's *velo* (veil), the framed network of threads used to transparently map a three-dimensional scene onto a two-dimensional surface **[60]** is made into a two-way sieve, partially screening the external spectator (the viewer) from the dissolving or emerging *rückenfigur*.[121] This evanescent disintegration, only increasing at close proximity, actually affirms identification or oneness with the pictured figure. This merging of actual and represented viewers configures an internal spectator, snared or suspended in the pictorial or visual net, phenomenologically and metaphorically.[122] *Inside the View* renders pictorial the intertwined senses of sight and touch. The gender of the figures can be read as an overtly positive outlook on women's stronger physiological connection to nature, bound to the lunar cycle.

A more critical aspect has been introduced in subsequent work, which feeds back into an appreciation of the *Inside the View* project. In her series *Beyond the View* **[61-64]** Sear has used similar techniques to combine two landscape views, one of which (again) includes a figure. Yet here they are tending to virtual

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where the two optic nerves cross, like a big 'X' at the base of the brain, which Merleau Ponty used as a metaphor to examine the intertwined relationship between the senses of touch and sight.

[120] This should be qualified, as one of the series of photographs contains a male figure, and also it is not always clear what the gender of Sear's figures are. Would this question be asked if the figures were predominantly male?

[121] Alberti's *velo* and the 'Art of Describing' come under greater scrutiny in the clearing Weather.

[122] 'The spectator of the picture identifies with this spectator in the picture, and by doing so, gains a particular access to the meaning of the [picture]. This is an act of centrally imagining: One imagines the scene from the inside, and from that particular viewpoint of the unrepresented spectator. Furthermore, for this viewpoint to contribute to our understanding of [the picture], it should be more than just a point of view: the internal spectator should have a repertoire of characteristic attitudes or responses. The repertoire is somehow suggested by the [picture].' Renée van de Vall, *Richard Wollheim on the Art of Painting*, Ed. Rob van Gerwen (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 180. [The implied repertoire of the internal spectator in *Inside the View* is one of an active yielding to the impression of a third, composite landscape held within the fabric of the screen].

**61** **Helen Sear**, *Beyond the View 1* (2009), photographic inkjet print, 110 x 110 cm.

**62** **Helen Sear**, *Beyond the View 2* (2010), photographic inkjet print, 110 x 110 cm.

**63** **Helen Sear**, *Beyond the View 4* (2009), photographic inkjet print, 110 x 110 cm.

**64** **Helen Sear**, *Beyond the View 7* (2010), photographic inkjet print, 110 x 110 cm.

65 **Claude Monet**, *Poppies at Argenteuil* (1873), oil on canvas, 50 x 65 cm.

66 **Claude Monet**, *Water Lilies (The Clouds)* (1903), oil on canvas, 75 x 105 cm

disappearance, almost entirely submerged within the landscape. This is a function of using at least one image that doesn't contain the sky, so the camera is looking down to the ground, filling the screen with far more pictorial information – deep recessional spaces. Additional to this, Sear has isolated the forms of flowers within the figureless scene. They mysteriously seem to float on the surface of the image, or as if on the surface of a lake – actually, both these perceptions at the same time.

*Beyond the View 2* and *7* provide an art historical link to the work of Claude Monet, specifically to one of his most 'chocolate-box' paintings, *Poppies at Argenteuil* (1873) [**65**]. The pre-cinematic mystery of this painting is that it seems to represent two stages in the progress of the same woman and child through the poppy field – two superimposed moments. Yet Sear's screenic link to Monet is more profound than this, for there is a perceptual connection to his late water lily paintings in all the *Beyond the View* works, for example *Water Lilies (The Clouds)* (1903) [**66**]. In these pictures the surface of the water reflects plants and sky around the pond, yet in their painting this reflected immateriality is paradoxically rendered in expressive, viscous paint. The paint lies on an equivalent surface to the lake, the canvas screen, suspended in front of an illusory beyond. The lilies are suspended on this visceral surface, but also the specular and transparent surface of the pond, between the reflected landscape and the imagined shadowy depths. With *Beyond the View* a similar pictorial confusion is created. The screen of the digital photograph uncannily replaces both the surface of the pond and the surface of the screen with its immaterial woven veil, suspending heads of flowers within its sheer, planar web.[123]

The meticulously hand-made, yet diaphanous intangibility of the *Beyond the View* works, with the suggestion of floral vanitas symbolism, are contextualised by some contemporaneous works. On a trip to Italy Sear was drawn to take photographs of reflections in rice fields [**67**], which evidently contain the same visual ambiguities of previous work, although here configured by the delicate filigree of rice stalks rather than a hand-traced veil. She has shown these large photographic prints alongside the *Inside the View* and *Beyond the View* series.[124] But together with these she showed some much smaller photographs framed by black, taken near the location of the rice fields: pictures of women in the landscape, hidden from consciousness or conscience – solitary women waiting for a car to stop, in the middle of nowhere [**68**].

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[123] 'Impressionism and symbolism may be conceived as analogous theories of expression, differing primarily in the role they assign to mediation, and technique. ... The artist's technique or means of expression was regarded as a system (perhaps merely a collection) of signs capable of translating, expressing, or making manifest the immediate truths of emotion and impression. ... One can discover universal 'truth' in both the ideal and the effect: the ideal is verified through intuition (all may respond to it) and the effect through attending to the empirical (all may observe it).' Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.43.

[124] In her exhibition *Beyond the View,* Hoopers Gallery, London, 2009.

**67** **Helen Sear**, *Rice Field 2* (2006) photographic inkjet print, 110 x 110 cm.

**68** **Helen Sear**, *Untitled* (2006), photographic print.

69 **Allan Otte**, *Knækket* (Broken) (2009), acrylic on canvas, 75 x 122 cm.

70 **Allan Otte**, *Knækket* (Broken), detail.

## Verge

> People often tell me that they know and recognise the landscapes that I depict. That's very funny and interesting too, because it's always sort of average-places that don't exist, and they're made out of fragments of different places.[125]

In Allan Otte's paintings the idea of 'average-places' seems to run counter to anything that could normally be called memorable or picturesque. They show a central figure or group of forms – buildings, structures or vehicles – set within an agricultural landscape and the rigid confines of the rectangle. The painting *Knækket* (Broken) is a striking example [**69**]. The toppled structure of a wind turbine describes a bold diagonal across the canvas, yet also comically suggests that this event was not the result of a calamity, but by a self-destructive desire, on the part of the turbine, to get into the frame.

The use of colour is extremely vivid throughout Otte's work, a carefully attenuated sliding scale of colour intensities, offset by expanses of neutral greys and whites [**70**]. The paintings suggest the heightened colour values of digital photography, but perhaps more so, the artificial exaggerations of CGI seen in video games or architectural modelling. Although the colour seems to reference present day imaging technologies, the careful staging of elements across the pictorial field, and the illusory fields of the landscape, are classical in composition. The 'snapshot' aesthetic variously incorporated into fine art photography and augmented by photorealist painters such as Gerhard Richter, and a host of contemporary followers, is not exhibited here. The implied motion behind the captured photographic moment is replaced by composed stillness.

Roads or paths can help facilitate the viewer's imaginative passage into the illusory perspectival depth beyond the surface of the picture plane. In Otte's paintings we're offered modern-day highways – seamless tarmac strips, channelling through nondescript countryside towards uneventful any-towns. Instead of a scenic vantage point, redolent of the picturesque painting tradition, we're located on an anonymous verge or embankment. Yet although these landscapes are not articulated by dramatic geographical features, and punctuated by romantic ruins, they are interrupted by contemporary wrecks. In the painting *Blokeret* (Blocked) [**71**] the usual swift and oblivious passage through one of these 'average-places' is abruptly halted by an overturned coach.

Otte's recent work presents situations of catastrophe, from mishap to devastation, involving machines and vehicles of various kinds, apparently just after an accident caused by human or mechanical failure, or natural forces. The scenes are devoid of life, or the blood-soaked traces of human victims. This is a continuing question for the not-so-innocent bystander, as the extent of possible injury varies

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[125] Allan Otte, excerpt from an email (written in English), January 2010.

71 **Allan Otte**, *Blokeret* (Blocked) (2009), acrylic on canvas, 75 x 122 cm.

72 **Allan Otte**, *Omvendt* (Upside Down) (2008), acrylic on canvas, 122 x 250 cm.

73 **Allan Otte**, *Presset* (Pressed) (2009), acrylic on canvas, 175 x 175 cm.

74 **Andy Warhol**, *Green Car Crash (Green Burning Car I)*, 1963.
Synthetic polymer, silkscreen ink and acrylic on linen, 229 x 203 cm.

hugely, from a tipped-over crane in *Tippet* (Tipped), to an overturned car in *Omvendt* (Upside Down) [72]. The recent painting *Presset* (Pressed) [73] presents a particularly disturbing situation: a head-on collision between a lorry and a car. It's in this ambivalent space, between the repellent nature of the subject matter and his sensuous painted surfaces, that Otte's work hovers. The sublime, as presented by awe inspiring, and perhaps terrifying manifestations of nature, is here condensed and neutralised into the weirdly becalmed moment after technology has gone wrong.

The titles serve to accentuate detachment from the drama with extreme matter-of-factness. *Blocked, divided, tipped, fallen, upside down, depressed, broken, into pieces,* etc. all offer the bare minimum of descriptive information, which could just as well explain a still life composition. However, these simple words also have psychological overtones, implying conflicted or unhappy mental states. Hal Foster coined the term 'traumatic realism' to describe the psychological implications of the horrific subject matter within Andy Warhol's *Death and Disaster* series (1962-63) [74]. Gruesome photographs, including many crash scenes, were enlarged from newspapers and repeatedly silk-screened onto canvas. Through enacting a machine-like compulsive repetition, Warhol places the viewer in the uncertain position of trying to psychically absorb the shocking event pictured, whilst at the same time becoming ever more fixated on it (only emphasised by the iconic size and status of his work).

> [T]his multiplicity makes for the paradox not only of images that are both affective and affectless, but also of viewers that are neither integrated (which is the ideal of most modern aesthetics: the subject composed in contemplation) nor dissolved (which is the effect of much popular culture: the subject given over to the schizo intensities of the commodity-sign).[126]

Returning to Otte's painting *Presset* (Pressed), and focusing on the mysteriously empty lorry driver's compartment, something strange and disquieting is happening. The perpendicular windscreen reflects the landscape in front – yet it doesn't contain a reflection of a viewer. This uncanny void indicates the spectator's physical removal from the scene – like the viewpoint of a ghost, lost in disembodied contemplation. The paradoxes of Foster's traumatic realism are extended, as Otte's images are 'affective and affectless' not through morbid fascination and multiplicity, but through the shock of an enforced neutrality. The viewer is both aesthetically 'integrated' (fixed in contemplative, perspectival relation to the picture) and fully 'dissolved'. Yet this dissolution is not caused by the mesmeric seductions of mass media images, but by the kaleidoscopic attractions of unusual painting techniques.

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[126] Hal Foster, *Return of the Real* (MIT Press, 1996), page 132.

Essential to Otte's process of working is masking tape.[127] It imposes a restriction on the amount of detail that can be achieved by scalpel cutting. So instead of applying uniformly flat colour within these masked-off sections, the paint is either airbrush sprayed, or successively dragged across in a 'streaked-brush' technique – a vibrant painting method seemingly unique to Otte's work.

Airbrushing suggests car spray-paint, or the fuzzy immateriality of out of focus photography and blurred CGI. It is often used in Otte's work for passages of sky, and sometimes other forms. The painting *Indgreb* (Interference) [**75**] demonstrates the metaphoric potential of this. Within the vast artificial canyon created by a limestone quarry, mark making on an industrial scale is represented by the hands-off caress of a stream of air. The very ground exploited by technology for raw material is shown exhausted – as intangible vapour.

The striated parallel lines within the 'streaked-brush' areas are rigidly oriented either horizontally or vertically. These sections follow their own internal logic, often working with or against the structure of things. The diagonal slopes of roofs, or walls in perspective are flattened. Receding fields can be represented with horizontal marks, yet a vertical rendering can describe the texture of grass. From a distance, the flaws and fluctuations of brush-stroked colour and stripes seem to approximate – and to magically stand in for – the missing detail caused by the limitations of the masking technique, as in *Delt* (Divided) [**76, 77**].

These fragments of image present an intermediate level of simulation within the represented view. Largely dependent on colour, they appear to have the surface qualities of wood grain, brushed metal or grooved plastic. We're presented with a jigsaw of wooden veneers, akin to the craft of marquetry, or an engineered metal and plastic construction, curiously flattened out. This second-order material illusion, lying in front of the pictorial one, traps the viewer in a perceptual ambivalence, on a semi-illusory screen between a realistic landscape depiction and the physical actuality of paint. The optical ambiguities between flat or faceted surfaces and ethereal, gaseous mists within Otte's paintings encompass technology's history: from a time-consuming artisanal medium, to industrial manufacturing, and the virtual realm of CGI.

There's also a link to the visual technology of painting. In 'synthetic' Cubism sections of found materials, such as newspapers and prints of wood grain, were collaged into still life compositions instead of being represented in paint. The radical break with perspectival space gained added potency with a proximity to trompe l'oeil illusionism. Cubism, and its profound influence on modern aesthetics, can be viewed as a kind of perceptual car crash, shattering integral forms into pieces, echoing societal break down and fractured subjectivity.[128] These

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[127] Masking tape was invented in 1925 to aid painters in the American car industry, forming a neat material link to his subject matter.

[128] For Henri Lefebvre, Cubism was, above all: 'disquieting, evoking neither pleasure, nor joy, nor calm – only intellectual interest and most likely anxiety. Anxiety in the face of

75 **Allan Otte**, *Indgreb* (Interference) (2007), acrylic on canvas, 205 x 260 cm.

76 **Allan Otte**, *Delt* (Divided) (2009), acrylic on canvas, 175 x 175 cm.

77 **Allan Otte**, *Delt* (Divided), detail.

**78** **Allan Otte**, *Blomstermaleri* (Flowerpainting) (2008), acrylic on canvas,122 x 122 cm.

broken, fragmented remains are simulated and reconstructed on the surface of Otte's paintings, in organic and crystalline formations. Hand-painted trompe l'oeil surfaces are sublimated in service to a greater illusion – that of a fully integrated depiction of a landscape. The focussed intensity of this labour can present a melancholic or desperate vision. Technology that has gone wrong is being made right. The screen and the landscape are being pieced back together.

*Blomstermaleri* (Flowerpainting) [**78**] presents the poignancy of this situation, and indicates the metaphoric significance of Otte's use of acrylic paint. If acrylics have a material association it's with plastic: a product of the petrochemical industry, characterised by its artificiality, malleability, durability, uniformity, and bright synthetic colours. So these blooms are rendered in eternal and lifeless plastic, their symbolic reference to transience and mortality all but severed. They pay appropriate tribute to a simulated crash scene; the vestiges of human devotion encapsulated in a machine-like, synthetic painting technique. Dissociated contemplation is now made everlasting by acrylic painting's physical substance.

A quiet apocalypse is meticulously presented across Otte's work. His choices of subject are curiously banal and devastating at the same time. Exhaustion of late-capitalist society's material and emotional resources are coolly staged as painted hallucinations. Yet with their startling illusionism and hand-made materiality, the paintings wage a battle against this technological and sociological abyss. Confronted by a baroque explosion of painterly colour and texture at the micro level, it is possible to imagine these destructive and entropic processes in reverse. His forensic reconstructions of the shattered screen signpost a piecing back together that's set to continue. The contorted crashed car will re-integrate, re-mould and right itself onto the road, reversing back to the beginning of its very long journey, far away from the vanishing point.

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what? In the face of the shattered figures of a world in pieces, in face of a disjointed space, and in face of a pitiless 'reality' that cannot be distinguished from its own abstraction, from its own analysis, because it 'is' already an abstraction, already in effect an analytics. And to the question of what takes the place of subjectivity, of expressiveness, the answer is: the violence which is unleashed in the modern world and lays waste to what exists there.' *The Production of Space* (1974), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell, 1991), p. 302.

> When the car slowly climbs up towards the horizon, all the while decreasing in size, I account for this appearance by constructing a displacement in terms of breadth such as I should perceive if I were observing the scene from an aeroplane, and which, in the last analysis, is the whole meaning of depth. But I have other signs of distance to go on. [129]

Merleau-Ponty's 'other signs of distance' operate, for the most part, subconsciously. They are automatic functions of the visual cortex, honed through experiences of being-in-the-world. They modulate perceptions of depth through various processes, for example: binocular vision, ocular depth of field, occlusion of objects by those in front, atmospherics, attachment to particular objects at proximity or distance, and accumulated experiences of movement of the eyes, the body, and objects in the field of view.[130]

As it commences, Mark Lewis's film *Algonquin Park, Early March* (2002), 4m 6s [**79-82**], shows an apparently blank screen. Yet this should be qualified, as there is a perceptible shimmer, not a uniform whiteness (as if the data-projector were simply showing an empty white frame). There is subtle screen noise,[131] and the viewer's assumption, especially given the landscape theme of the title, is that an empty expanse of sky is being shown, although it is impossible to gain a sense of orientation, or the scale of the pictorial frame.[132] The impression of sky is affirmed when the tops of pine trees slowly start appearing at the bottom edge of the screen around a minute into the film. These shapes gradually accumulate, and the viewer's initial perception might be that the camera is panning downwards. However, this is quickly corrected by the realisation that the trees are receding from view. Given the rough terrain, and the impossible logistics involved, the camera must be assumed to be fixed and using a slowly widening zoom lens to give the impression of moving

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[129] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (Routledge Classics, 2002), p.297.

[130] As already discussed in the clearing Thicket.

[131] The film was shot on 35mm film and later digitally transferred. The screen noise is produced by digitally interpolated film grain.

[132] Another possibility, given the length of time the screen is blank, is an artistic link to Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* (1964), previously discussed in the clearing Thicket.

79 **Mark Lewis**, *Algonquin Park, Early March* (2002), 4m 6s,
super 35mm transferred to High Definition, film stills.

**80** **Mark Lewis**, *Algonquin Park, Early March* (2002), 4m 6s,
super 35mm transferred to High Definition, film stills.

**81** **Mark Lewis**, *Algonquin Park, Early March* (2002), 4m 6s,
super 35mm transferred to High Definition, film stills.

**82** **Mark Lewis**, *Algonquin Park, Early March* (2002), 4m 6s,
super 35mm transferred to High Definition, film still of final frame.



**83** **Mark Lewis**, *Algonquin Park, Early March* (2002), 4m 6s,
super 35mm transferred to High Definition, film still detail of running dog.

away, rather than tracking backwards.[133] Slowly, over a couple of minutes, the top of a forested mountain ridge fills the bottom quarter of the frame, locating the camera as looking slightly upwards towards the sky beyond.

Then something momentarily inexplicable happens at around three minutes into the film. A large dark form encroaches on the top right of the frame, and just as a new apprehension of the scene is forming in the mind, a small, fast-moving dot moves purposely across the blank field of 'sky' from the right-hand edge, and returns back – the unmistakable bounding form of a dog, running to retrieve something [**83**]. A lozenge shape has appeared where the dog has come from: an ice-skating rink with perhaps a dozen skaters, circling around each other on a snow-covered frozen lake. The dark form is the edge of a forest, which is later joined by another at the top-left of the picture as the camera zooms out further.

The imagined orientation of the camera has switched from looking up to majestic pines to looking down from a great height to a lake. Ethereal, depthless sky has been replaced by the flat constancy of snow on ice, broken by islands of trees and the oblong of skaters in the field of snow. At the end of the film, the whiteness of snow stretches far away, beyond the two islands of forest to the top edge of the screen – although the line of the horizon remains unreached.

The zoom-out is a cinematic device most closely associated with the ending of a film, a visual metaphor for leaving the heroes, lovers or protagonists in their geographical and narrative context. Indeed, as soon as a zooming out commences the habituated response is that the film, or a scene within it, is coming to a close – just as a zooming in might be part of a montage that sets up the narrative in the first place. *Algonquin Park, Early March* isolates the simple perceptual conundrum of the zoom as a visual analogy for the focusing and releasing of attention, one equally applicable to both looking at actual landscape, and a photographic or painted image.

There is no standard frame in terms of a section of the visual field used for pictorial representation. Yet with the advent of telephoto and wide-angle lenses the world has been photographically framed in ways that diverge widely from human vision. As Rudolf Arheim comments: 'Since our eyes can move freely in every direction, our field of vision is practically unlimited. A film image, on the other hand, is definitely bounded by its margins. Only what appears within these margins is visible, and therefore the film artist is forced – has the opportunity – to make a

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[133] 'In addition to [the zoom lens] providing a range of positions from close-up to long shot from a single camera setup for which it seems to have been developed and as it was initially used, this lens permits 'zooming,' a virtual movement that can mechanically and smoothly traverse space more rapidly than a camera on a dolly as well as indicate trajectories almost impossible for a conventional camera, such as across mountain peaks.' P. Adams Sitney, 'Landscape in the Cinema,' *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, Ed. Kemal and Gaskell (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 111.

selection from the infinity of real life.'[134] The first industrially produced zoom lens was by Bell and Howell Cooke 'Varo' 40–120 mm lens for 35mm movie cameras, introduced in 1932, so the particular psychological implications of the zoom did not make it into Arnheim's Film as Art. Indeed, according to P. Adams Sitney, the use of a widening or narrowing zoom within the film action was not used as a cinematic device until the 1950s.[135] It could be argued that although zooming is an artificial lens technique, it merely echoes in optical form an imaginary perceptual process always at work in the comprehension of a scene or a pictorial representation: whether picking out figures in the distance, or grasping the number of a bus; or, conversely, releasing such attention to get a broader impression of the whole scene. Neither of these psychic projections would seem to offer a more objective or subjective viewpoint – it's their dynamic interplay over time that creates a fuller picture. However, the slowly narrowing or widening zoom portend the revelatory, like a slow realisation – a dawning. Both offer more information, either greater detail, or an improved sense of location or orientation. The artificial, cinematic suspense of a dream-like disembodiment – the rotation of a lens standing in for imaginative projection – is an uncanny experience, although one with which audiences have become accustomed to.[136]

Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Return of the Hunters* (1565)[137] [**84**] can provide a painted reference point for *Algonquin Park, Early March*, with similar skaters on lozenges of ice cut into the snow.[138] Bruegel's painting, with its incredible attention to detail, invites active 'zooming in' in terms of the viewer's inevitable desire to get in close to see the tiny figures in their astonishing detail. *Algonquin Park, Early March* uses a slow zoom-out, which, conversely, offers a supposedly more objective view of a situation, slowly becoming aware of a broader visual field – an elevated, god-like view of the landscape, a perspective reminiscent of Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalist: 'I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.'[139]

By the end of Lewis's film, the skaters are barely visible – just moving dots. But this isn't the only way that Lewis's film highlights the limitations (thereby the possibilities) of the screen image. The sensory clues as to the position of the viewer

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[134] Rudolph Arnheim, *Film as Art* (1932) (University of California Press, 1957), p. 73.

[135] P. Adams Sitney, 'Landscape in the Cinema,' *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, Ed. Kemal and Gaskell (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 111.

[136] As with depth of field, I have not been able to find any phenomenological accounts of zooming effects in film theory, including those on Michael Snow's influential film Wavelength (1967).

[137] The painting is also known as *The Hunters in the Snow*.

[138] As noted by Bernard Fibicher in *Painterly Aspects*, a catalogue essay for Lewis's exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern in 2003.

[139] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836), p. 996.

84 **Pieter Bruegel the Elder**, *Return of the Hunters* (1565).

85 **Katsushika Hokusai**, *Kites Flying from Rooftops* (c1830-1832).

are entirely visual, and play with the loss of proprioceptive stimuli – the position of the viewing subject's head and body in space, whether looking upward or downward.[140] The medium of landscape pre-programs a visual reading of blankness as sky above the line of the horizon as if looking on from the side, as the 'diagram' at the beginning of this clearing illustrates. Arnheim suggests: 'the spectator cannot tell from what angle a film shot has been taken. Hence, unless the subject matter tells him otherwise, he assumes that the camera was at rest and that it was shooting straight.'[141] And in some way the film tickles this visual desire in the closing moments. The rectangular shape of the ice rink might thus become the diamond-form of a kite with a tail, returned to an imaginary sky – or at least the intervening mist between mountaintop and lake. Symbolically it speaks of human transience and insignificance (an existential rather than an environmental message).[142]

The closing frames of Lewis's film indicate associations with an earlier landscape tradition, that of the Chinese, who revered mountains as sacred. In their paintings, containing diminutive temples or dwellings of immortals, where the towering verticality of mountains are visually expressed by intervening blank spaces, representing layers of clouds and mist.[143] This is a quality echoed in Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above a Sea of Mist* (1818) [**58**], where confusions between sky and earth operate on an allegorical, transcendental level. But the confusion in *Algonquin Park, Early March* is not born of a natural, atmospheric phenomenon, transferred through nebulous painting technique, but by disembodying screen and camera technology – a mechanical internalisation of Romanticism's *rückenfigur*, the detached human witness to the scene within many of Friedrich's paintings.[144]

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[140] Proprioception also includes the sense of the body in motion, and extending this (tantalisingly), the physicist David Bohm suggests that there is an innate proprioceptive sense of the movement of thought – see the chapter Estrangement.

[141] Arnheim, Ibid., p. 102.

[142] The Canadian 'Group of Seven' painter Tom Thomson painted in Algonquin Park over several years, with his fellow artists drawn to depicting (and venturing further) into the wilderness. 'These pictures deny human presence by depicting landscapes without figural witnesses. The very inscription of the subject as figural witness is an obstacle to the fulfilling of an apocalyptic intention, the utter dissolution of human presence, which the witnessing itself arrests by its being visually posited.' Jonathan Bordo, 'Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness,' *Landscape and power* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994, 2002), p. 296. Lewis's film shows the camera – in a literal, mechanical way – as disinterested witness, even if the viewer strives to 'zoom-in' imaginatively – the usual motion of an encounter with an artwork.

[143] It is possible to see Taoism as a tranquil cousin to the supposed negativity of European Existentialism. Beckett's protagonists, in the face of post-industrial adversity, come across as exemplars of a Taoist go-with-the-flow approach to a given situation.

[144] 'The *Rückenfigur* indeed draws the beholder into the canvas, making the landscape seem closer, more immediate, yet his otherness to landscape makes nature something experienced only from afar, from the standpoint of the *Bürger* who has lost a natural bond to the land and seeks it now with his gaze. His gaze, which defines his surroundings not as

If the closing frames of *Algonquin Park, Early March* have a close pictorial equivalent it would seem to be with Hokusai's *Kites Flying from Rooftops* (c1830-1832) [**85**]. The white expanse of the paper is activated as both a ground for graphic form on the surface, and as unlimited space, where the kite seems to inhabit both realms (especially given its similarity to the box of text to the left). Depth is a latent quality of the screen image, until dispelled by the appearance of graphics on its surface, or, in this case, the realisation of a snow-covered lake in place of sky. This is a phenomenological difference between paper or canvas, and the screen, which tends to imply a missing image in its blank state.[145] In Lewis's film the ice rink is inscribed on a white receding surface, akin to Hokusai's paper, a surface that wants to be perceived as indeterminate, expectant depth at the beginning of the film, and flat, perpendicular surface by the end, with the forested fringe at the bottom, and the floating islands above, appearing as flat, silhouetted cut-outs – appearing as if out of a layer of fog.

Breughel's *Return of the Hunters* appears in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Solaris* (1972) [**86**], which offers more points of confluence with Lewis's film.[146] It is on the wall of the library in the orbiting space station, amongst reproductions of other Breugel paintings, and a whole assortment of antique objects and furniture. This is the setting for the plot's central philosophical debate amongst the three scientists, Snout, Sartorius, Kriss, and the 'guest' Hari, about human nature and the reasons for exploration.

After the heated discussion, Hari is left contemplating *Return of the Hunters*, sitting smoking a cigarette. The camera shows her imagined gaze of the painting, zooming in first to a close-up of one of the hunter's dogs in the foreground, the only figure in the painting whose eyes engage with the viewer. Then slow cross-fades between panning and zooming shots, moving across and through the

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his home, but as something 'beautiful', distances him from the landscape.' Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (Reaktion Books, 1990), pp. 255-256.

[145] 'Even though *Algonquin Park, Early March* is a clear echo of Bruegel's winter landscape, this short sequence is not a painting. It is an approach to painting; that is, the film is a potential painting. In the first minute of the March version of *Algonquin Park* we are alerted to the difference between the two media (film and painting): the shimmering white surface appears not as a monochrome image, but as a pure projection of light—or even as a disturbance? However it is interpreted, it suggests a *missing* image. When the film is viewed in a gallery, the surface upon which it is projected quite evidently serves as a receiver of images rather than a pictorial support.' Bernard Fibicher, Ibid.

[146] The Sea of Solaris, from Stanislav Lem's novel Solaris (1961) is an ocean covering the surface of an alien planet. It has the power to construct perfect simulacra of human beings from the most painful memories of the inhabitants of an orbiting spaceship, in response to their aggressive probing into the nature of the planet. Andrei Tarkovsky's 1972 film adaptation is being referenced here, rather than the novel, for its inspired introduction of the Breugel painting into the storyline, as well as the final scene with Kriss's father.

86 *Solaris* (USSR 1972), directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, film stills from the library levitation scene, 6 mins.

painting, as imagined sounds of human life, church bells, dogs barking and birdsong can be heard, as Hari absorbs the landscape of human work and recreation.

Then there's a sequence where Kriss and Hari experience the disorienting effects of zero gravity, and the painting is returned to briefly by the camera, as Hari holds Kris in her arms, and a melancholic Bach choral prelude plays. It zooms first to the top of the picture, to the snow-covered fields beyond a distant church, and then out from a detail of trees to show another distant village towards the horizon.

In both films the dogs trigger a questioning about the orientation of the viewer, either philosophically or perceptually. The shimmering screen at the beginning of Lewis's film is suggestive of the Sea of Solaris – an apparent emptiness, latent with possibility. Rosalind Krauss makes elemental connections to the use of the window or mirror in symbolist painting, a symbolism through which it is possible to read both films: with the fluidity of the camera's zooming, the shimmering screen, and the frozen landscape:

> Flowing and freezing; *glace* in French means glass, mirror, and ice; transparency, opacity, and water. In the associative system of symbolist thought this liquidity points in two directions. First, towards the flow of birth – the amniotic fluid, the 'source' – but then, towards the freezing into stasis or death – the unfecund immobility of the mirror.[147]

Weightlessness inspires Hari to hold Kriss in her arms like his mother, yet in Lewis's film the scene becomes a flattened picture by the end – a cool, deathly, God-like view of the world. *Algonquin Park, Early March* configures a journey from expectant screen, through pristine snowy landscape, then transient human intervention, then picturesque vista, to frozen image. A comparison can be made to the final scene of Solaris, where the camera flies away from Kriss and his replicated father on the shore of a frozen lake, up through trees and clouds to reveal the landscape as a simulated island forming on the Sea of Solaris [**87**].

Most profoundly, the incremental smoothness of Lewis's slow zooming out hints at the notion of the soul leaving the body, travelling to the sweet hereafter through the agency of the screen – from a blank perspectival vanishing point to a corporeal one.[148]

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[147] Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Popular Myths* (MIT Press). After the levitation scene in the library Hari drinks liquid oxygen in an attempt to try and kill herself – a condensed, artificial form of air as water – or liquid ice.

[148] *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997) is a film by Atom Egoyan, adapted from the novel by Russel Banks (1991), similarly set in a wintery Canada. The central tragedy of the school bus crashing, sliding onto the frozen lake, then sinking into its depths, is seen from a terrifying distance – in the sense that the father following the bus (the filmic *rückenfigur*) is unable to reach the scene in time to save the children, whose muted screams can barely be heard across the snow-covered landscape.

87 *Solaris* (USSR, 1972), directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, film stills from the closing scene, 6 mins.

## Landscape

*Landscape as Medium*

Through urbanisation and the increasing technological exploitation of land, simply as a resource for food, energy, and construction materials, the abstract notion of landscape becomes ever further demarcated as something separate from everyday human experience. This is in geographic terms in the case of national parks, but these landscapes are also cordoned off economically and conceptually. Heidegger articulates this process of technological instrumentalism into the notion of the standing-reserve:

> Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve.[149]

Not only is the standing-reserve applicable to raw materials and other natural resources, for example coal or rivers for the generation of electricity, but also, by extension, human resources are quantified by the same system.[150] Just as a forest can be measured for its value as timber for construction or firewood, so its value can be calculated as a human leisure resource for sport, escape, or the appreciation of natural beauty. Heidegger questions whether it is possible for humanity to see outside of this instrumentalist view of the world if they themselves are an integral part of this system.

> The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already affected man in his essence. The rule of Enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.[151]

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[149] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1955), trans. W. Lovitt (Harper and Row, 1977), p. 17.

[150] *Hydro-Electricity in Quebec* (unknown artist) [**88, 89**] is an A2 size print from a 1960s educational series, presenting the technological and cultural glories of the British commonwealth. I happened upon it in Greenwich market in 1991. A detail shows the miraculous, Magritte-like, genesis of the power station out of the man's pipe – a pipe dream. It is a powerful pictorial evocation of Heidegger's standing reserve, for which he uses a hydro-electricity plant on the Rhine as an example.

[151] Martin Heidegger, Ibid, p.28.

**88** *Hydro-Electricity in Quebec* (1960s), unknown artist.

**89** *Hydro-Electricity in Quebec*, detail.

Landscape objectified means it is fixed and delimited as standing reserve. As Anne Friedberg acknowledges, Heidegger's 'rule of Enframing' doesn't configure a literal 'frame,' but a metaphysical one. But she insists that the notion of Enframing can 'include the metaphysics of the literal frame,'[152] her metaphorical 'virtual window,' thus containing screen and landscape in the same closed system. Wolfgang Scheppe sees this process leading to an apparently inescapable ontology of landscape as image-object:

> In its conceptual history, the mode of the landscape's perception reveals its origins in landscape painting, a petrified genre of fine art able to become independent via a vast vicious circle of representation as an unconscious contemplation of the world through image. Image and landscape are at root the same. The landscape arose in the image, and the image became the landscape.[153]

There is the accepted art-historical view that abstract painting was the modernist successor to landscape, 'a logical outgrowth of its antimimetic tendencies,'[154] for which Cézanne, Kandinsky and Mondrian are to thank. As W.J.T. Mitchell continues, 'there is no doubt that the classical and romantic genres of landscape painting evolved during the great age of European Imperialism now seem exhausted, at least for the purposes of serious painting.'[155] Yet landscape never went away as a subject, especially over recent decades with the rise of environmentalism and continual territorial disputes, wars and migration. Of course, photojournalism or documentary films are the places where these issues can be explored most urgently.[156]

What actually constitutes landscape as an art genre today in the midst of urbanisation, information technology, high-definition lens based media and CGI spectacle? Where are the artistic points of resistance to the seemingly automatic

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[152] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. 96.

[153] Wolfgang Scheppe, 'Lewis Baltz and the Garden of False Reality,' *Candlestick Point* (Steidl, 2011), p. 84.

[154] W.J.T.Mtchell, *Landscape and Power* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 20.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Of Course, artists have increasingly made interventions within the documentary form to conceptual and political ends. For example: Lewis Baltz's and Bernd and Hilla Becher's photographs of industrial landscapes; and later, with the possibility of video installations (often multi-screen), the documentary form has either been directly transferred from film and television, or more interestingly, been questioned, parodied, or poeticised, by Alfredo Jaar, Walid Raad, or Zenib Sedira, to name just a few...

mode of the screen to either make the audience forget its existence, or to make its presence known with interactive graphics and multiplying virtual windows?[157]

'The appeal to authenticity of experience is what brings the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy together,'[158] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin explain in their book Remediation. Even if technological hypermediacy may seem to block experience of the world, through its very opacity it reveals 'the fact that knowledge of the world comes to us through media. The viewer acknowledges that she is in the presence of a medium and learns through acts of mediation or indeed learns about mediation itself.'[159] Immediacy and hypermediacy form a continuum, where an individual or societal group may have widely differing experiences due to their exposure and habituation to particular media. For Mitchell, landscape is not excluded from this dynamic:

> Landscape may be represented by painting, drawing, or engraving; by photography, film, and theatrical scenery; by writing, speech, and presumably even music and other 'sound images.' Before all these secondary representations, however, landscape is itself a physical and multisensory medium (earth, stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound and silence, light and darkness, etc.) in which cultural meanings and values are encoded, whether they are *put* there by the physical transformation of place in landscape gardening and architecture, or *found* in a place formed, as we say, 'by nature.'[160]

As a 'multisensory medium' actual landscape's 'cultural meanings and values' are shaped by its various topographies and meteorological occurrences, generating symbolic forms and spatial or psychological metaphors. These mental abstractions feed into perceptions of landscape: as a beautiful ideal, offering transcendent communion with a primal truth; as a site for escape from the frenetic, technology driven world; as natural mirror to ideas about subjective, societal, or metaphysical existence; or simply as a medium which supports human life. As Rachael Ziady DeLue summarises:

> [H]umans use landscapes of all sorts (natural, pictorial, symbolic, mythic, imagined, built, and so forth, if such distinctions can be drawn) as means to artistic, social, economic, and political ends (some nefarious, some not), as well

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[157] There is deliberate ambiguity in this sentence. Does the audience forget its own existence or the screen's? Are they made aware of their presence or the screen's? Or both?

[158] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation* (MIT Press, 2000), p.71.

[159] Ibid, pp.70-71.

[160] W.J.T.Mtchell, *Landscape and Power* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.14.

as the manner in which landscapes of all sorts act on and shape *us*, as if agents in their own right.[161]

*Landscape as Phenomenon*

Land or Environmental Art is all about phenomenological presence. For John Wylie, discussing Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* in the context of landscape phenomenology, the making and experience of it was to do with 'immersion in and corporeal experience of landscape,' whilst supposedly dispensing with the idea of landscape as 'a static scene to survey with a cool, measured and discerning gaze.'[162] Land Art would thus seem to eschew landscape's representational subgenres – 'notions such as the Ideal, the Heroic, the Pastoral, the Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque.'[163] Yet through photographic or textual documentation (let alone the attendant narratives of the heroic journey or creating works at awe-inspiring scales) these themes inevitably return, as Smithson parodied in his quasi-picturesque tour of *The Monuments of Passaic* [**90**], an urban development in New Jersey, which serves as a technologically mediated experience of the picturesque sublime:

> Noonday sunshine cinema-sized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an over-exposed picture. Photographing it with my instamatic 400 was like photographing a photograph. The sun became a monstrous light-bulb that projected a detailed series of 'stills' through my instamatic into my eye. When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel, underneath the river existed as an enormous movie film that showed nothing but a continuous blank.[164]

This passage can be taken as a protest against photographic or filmic representation and their influence on perception of landscape, all but destroying any human sense of being there: a profound dissociation from nature, which should be re-aligned with natural, entropic processes for Smithson, for whom 'the false immortality of the film gives the viewer an illusion of control over eternity.'[165]

Yet Smithson's equivalences, however impoverished, of film media to human perceptions of landscape (photograph as human construction), technical

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[161] *Landscape Theory*, Ed. Rachael Ziady DeLue, James Elkins (Routledge, 2008), p. 11.

[162] John Wylie, *Landscape* (Routledge, 2007), p. 143.

[163] W.J.T.Mtchell, Ibid, p.14.

[164] Robert Smithson, *The Monuments of Passaic* (Artforum 6, December 1967). Reprinted in *Robert Smithson: the Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (University of California Press, 1996), p. 70.

[165] Ibid., p. 74.

apparatuses (light bulb and moving film) to natural forces (sunlight, flowing water), hint at the possibilities for revealing, rather than masking, phenomenological questions. If film's and other media's wrongly supposed immortality is brought into question through attending to their material qualities, limitations, and entropic equivalences to natural forces, then they can mirror the transitory nature of landscape, and human experience of it. In this way, Merleau-Ponty's seeing, yet 'visible and mobile' subject, being 'caught in the fabric of the world,'[166] is echoed, or even enhanced, rather than suppressed or superseded, by being caught in the fabric (or quasi-corporeality) of imaging technologies, from painting to digital media.

Kaja Silverman reads Smithson's text as a 'claim that the world in its entirety solicits the click of an actual or imaginary camera, and that it does so by making itself in advance into a 'photograph.''[167] Photographic representation coincides with and influences Lacan's internal image-screen: 'the depth of field, with all its ambiguity and variability, which is in no way mastered by me. It is rather it that grasps me, solicits me at every moment, and makes of the landscape something other than landscape, something other than what I have called a picture.'[168] For Silverman, the influence of photography on perception 'is not that literal photographs block our access to objects and landscapes, but that when we look at these things it is more often than not through an imaginary viewfinder.'[169]

Phenomenology must embrace the influence of lens-based media on human perception, for the advent of the photographic camera is merely part of a representational continuum, which would seem to have always coincided with the human gaze, according to Lacan:

> What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument

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[166] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind,' (1964) trans. Carleton Dallery, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader* (Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 354.

[167] Kaja Silverman, *The Thresholds of the Visible World* (Routledge, 1996), p. 200.

[168] Jacques Lacan, 'Of the Gaze,' *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (Norton, 1981), p. 96.

[169] Kaja Silverman, *The Thresholds of the Visible World* (Routledge, 1996), p. 197. She quotes Vilem Flusser: 'Images are meant to render the world accessible and imaginable to man. But, even as they do so, they interpose themselves between man and the world. They are meant to be maps, and they become screens. Instead of presenting the world to man, they re-present it, put themselves in place of the world, to the extent that man lives as a function of the images he has produced. He no longer deciphers them, but projects them back into the world 'out there' without having deciphered them. The world becomes image-like.' Vilem Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (Gottingen: European Photography, 1984), p. 7.

through which light is embodied and through which – if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form – I am *photo-graphed.*[170]

In light of the screen's hegemonic influence on perception, revealing circumspect and visually complex approaches to landscape representation is a political imperative. Revealing can range through materials, processes and apparatuses that offer experiential equivalences and contradictions between screen and landscape. This might be with pigmented mud on a weave of natural fibres, or watery ink on sediments of paper. It could be through tampering with the normal functioning of screen technology, its hardware and software, its position in space, or de-familiarising the effects of lenses or computer-generated imagery (CGI) that provide the screen's pictorial content.

By inflecting the screen through landscape, and landscape through the screen, the aim is not to contain discussion of their relationship, but more to shift between literal and metaphoric, or elemental and symbolic, conceptions (or abstractions) of actual landscape, the art historical genre, and the physical or perceptual screen. This might be traced against the background of art history, outmoded technologies, evolutionary development, or childhood experience.

> An initial perception independent of any background is inconceivable. Every perception presupposes, on the perceiving subject's part, a certain past, and the abstract function of perception, as a coming together of objects, implies some more occult act by which we elaborate our environment.[171]

This occult act is technological.

*Landscape as Memory*

John Wylie articulates criticisms of landscape phenomenology, a supposed return to authentic experience, on the grounds that it prioritises 'emotion and perception, treating it as a priori and given, and thus failing to recognise that the very notion of the free, autonomous individual is to some degree an ideological fabrication essential to the functioning of a capitalist socio-economic system.'[172] Alongside this, phenomenology is in danger of courting nostalgia for the rustic or primitive – rather than a search for the primal, as Wylie continues: 'phenomenological approaches run the risk of romanticising the pre-modern, and particularly the non-

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[170] Jacques Lacan, 'Of the Gaze,' *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* (Norton, 1981), p. 106.

[171] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 328.

[172] John Wylie, *Landscape* (Routledge, 2007), pp. 180-181.

**90** **Robert Smithson**, *The Great Pipe Monument* and *The Bridge Monument Showing Wooden Sidewalks* (1967), photographs.

**91** YouTube videos showing the first 'Western' contact with the Toulambi tribe in Papua New Guinea in 1976. Film footage by Jean Pierre Dutilleux.

**92** Google Earth, screen shot

Western ... romantic fantasies of Arcadian innocence and oneness with nature which characterised many colonial and imperial representations of non-European others.'[173]

As the elusive 'homeland of our thoughts,' as external exemplifier for the possibility of connecting with a primal truth, landscape is relegated to secondary representations on the screen in the works discussed here. Perhaps inevitably, these can have the nostalgic or mournful air of romanticism about them, either connected to the use of outmoded technologies or idealised landscape imagery. Joseph Leo Koerner, in his thoroughgoing interpretation of Caspar David Friedrich's work encapsulates romanticism's themes as follows:

> a heightened sensitivity to the natural world, combined with a belief in nature's correspondence to the mind; a passion for the equivocal, the indeterminate, the obscure and the faraway (objects shrouded in fog, a distant fire in the darkness, mountains merging with clouds, etc); a celebration of subjectivity bordering on solipsism, often coupled with a morbid desire that that self be lost in nature's various infinities; an infatuation with death; valorization of night over day, emblematizing a reaction against enlightenment and rationalism; a nebulous but all-pervading mysticism; and a melancholy, sentimental longing or nostalgia which can border on kitsch.[174]

If there is romanticism in the work discussed through Screen as landscape it has to do with a longing for visceral encounter with both landscape and technological artefact or artwork – a trans-cultural phenomenon that is a spectrum of degrees of the screen's influence, not a binary opposition between those who have or haven't had contact with camera and screen technology. For the media screen can be taken as almost ubiquitous to human experience, the most isolated tribal communities often having encountered it through the documentation of their existence (possibly ahead of seeing any other technological artefacts) **[91]**.[175] A phenomenological approach to both screen and landscape can thus quietly (and not apolitically) acknowledge the impending hegemonic influence of the screen by attending to the affects of imaging technology on perception of the environment.

Even if the mediated landscapes presented here are broadly phenomenological, being primarily concerned with the subjective vagaries of human perception, they are instructed by obtrusive imaging technologies, from inhuman lenses to visceral filmic, digital or painted surfaces. If romanticism was a search for a lost sense of

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[173] John Wylie, *Landscape* (Routledge, 2007), p. 183.

[174] Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (Reaktion Books, 1990), p. 29.

[175] 'He sees Philip, who must look like a strange creature with the eye of a camera instead of a human face.' Anthropologist-filmmaker Jean Pierre Dutilleux narrating footage of first contact with the Toulambi tribe of Papua New Guinea in 1976. www.youtube.com/ watch?v=xd0I1xAICOc&feature=fvwrel

unity, destroyed by empiricism and scientific rationalism, then its troubled project continues in the digital age, where the high-tech screen masks embodied encounter with the world.

Richard Coyne uses the term 'technoromanticism' to encapsulate the post-industrial revolution's promise to deliver unity on many levels, countering the effects on society and the individual of the industrial revolution – those of fragmentation and disintegration. For Coyne, the networked globe, 'virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and artificial life ...[imply]... a presumption that we can have total control or omnipotence, play God, by simulating, mastering, redefining, manipulating, and controlling space, time, community, thought, and life.'[176] Yet the background anxiety is that the seductive, emancipatory promises of new technology hide an in-built structural end game, which is anti-human, relying on hierarchies of corporate control, surveillance, and suppression. Individuals and groups are disenfranchised and infantilised through automated statistical feedback loops, where interfacial immersion is taken as being-in-the-world, where simulated presence supersedes actuality – a pseudo-Arcadian innocence and oneness with the system – a techno-landscape.

The Internet amasses and distributes an inexorable memory-archive of landscape imagery, ranging from the prosaic snapshot to the shiny tourism promo, from the indifferent web-camera to the simulated virtual world [**92**]. It can seem that most of the art-historical genre is uploaded, in hugely varying quality – along with archived photography and film, from postcards to early film experiments. From the computer interface these 'elsewheres' and 'elsewhens' are all equally proximate, both spatially and temporally, and rendered through the homogenising technological matrix. Landscape just becomes 'a flickering text displayed on a screen whose meaning can be created, extended, altered, elaborated and finally obliterated by the merest touch of a button.'[177]

> What is happening here when, as a result of the abolition of great distances, everything is equally far and equally near? What is this uniformity in which everything is neither far nor near – is, as it were, without distance?[178]

If the works examined in Screen as Landscape can be characterised, then melancholy, a yearning for something lost or missing, is the sentiment expressed. What is lost or missing is tangible depth, 'with all its ambiguity and variability.'[179]

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[176] Richard Coyne, *Technoromanticism: digital narrative, holism, and the romance of the real* (MIT, 1999), p. 4.

[177] *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis E. Cosgrove & Stephen Daniels (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 8.

[178] Martin Heidegger, 'The Thing', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Harper Collins, 1971). Reprinted in *The Object Reader*, ed. Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (Routledge, 2009), p. 113.

Perceptual phenomenology aims to unify our shared subjective experience against the conceptual abstractions of empiricism; and romanticism longs for a sense of metaphysical unity against the same adversary. In a sense they walk hand-in-hand, although differing markedly in their approaches. Both are existential philosophies, fusing two romantic fantasies of not belonging: the negative, melancholic 'we long to belong, but don't' (romanticism), and the positive, questioning 'we don't belong but once did and long to do so again'[180] (phenomenology). For Robin Kelsey, the 'problem of landscape ... is not a matter of getting the right image of belonging; it is a matter of trying to make belonging happen in a world of images.'[181]

An estranged ambivalence towards vision technologies and landscape is the abiding strategy of the various artworks examined here – or, at least, this is the mode of interpretation that has been spun upon them.

*But in her web she still delights*
*To weave the mirror's magic sights,*
*For often through the silent nights*
*A funeral, with plumes and lights*
*And music, went to Camelot;*
*Or when the Moon was overhead,*
*Came two young lovers lately wed.*
*'I am half sick of shadows,' said*
*The Lady of Shalott.*[182]

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[179] Jacques Lacan, 'Of the Gaze,' *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* (Norton, 1981), p. 96.

[180] '[L]andscape has been a technology to recognize our status as a species that does not belong.' Robin Kelsey, 'Landscape as Not Belonging,' *Landscape Theory,* Ed. Rachael Ziady DeLue, James Elkins (Routledge, 2008), p. 207.

[181] Ibid. p. 209.

[182] 8th stanza from *The Lady of Shallot* (1842), by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

**93** Stills from a Samsung TV advertisement (2011).

## Prairie

John Gerard's computer animations extend automated, adrenalin-fuelled spectacle – the default mode of CGI used in computer games and films – into scenes that play-out over many years in real time. Human separation from the most profound effects of human actions on the environment is the theme of his work. The use of CGI serves to relocate notions of transcendental beauty associated with pristine wilderness, into sumptuous, yet relentless high-definition computer simulations of vast flat landscapes with virtually no topographic features – the planes of endless American prairies, dotted with an occasional telegraph pole. A few cirrus clouds modulate the clear sky in the same formations every day, as the sun or moon continue to circle within their changing arcs, between summer and winter solstices.

Although spectacular to the present-day viewer, these kinds of CGI spectacle are doomed to speedy obsolescence after being overtaken by ever more sophisticated software and higher-resolution screens. So the spectacular is a transitory experience, and, more importantly, one limited by the ubiquity of CGI effects in films and computer games.

Yet can this notional obsolescence now be questioned? Gerard's simulations seem incredibly realistic, bringing thoughts that, along with the film Avatar, for example, CGI technology is reaching an event horizon, where it is indistinguishable from the real. This is heightened by the sense that screen technology is beginning to question representation's fundamental divergence from viewing the world directly, both in terms of resolution and contrast ratio. It seems almost possible that the blinding brightness of the sun might soon be replicated [**93**].

Gerard's *Animated Scene (Oil Field)* (2007) [**94**] shows the slow, disembodied circular transit of a simulated viewpoint around a nodding-donkey oil well, situated in a field of these machines stretching off to the horizon. The elevated smoothness of the virtual camera's movement functions as a visual metaphor for hopes of leaving no human trace, even if it approximates to eye-level running speed. As Gerard's real-time animation continues unabated into the future – the camera circling, as the nodding-donkey nods, as the sun traverses the sky – the audience is left with an ideal impression of timelessness and calm, reminiscent of American luminist painters such as Sanford Gifford [**95**], whose work, according to Barbara Novak, 'in eliminating any reminders of the artist's intermediary presence, remove him even from his role of interpreter. In their quiet tranquillity, they reach to a mystical oneness above time and outside of space.'[183] In *Animated Scene (Oil Field)* the picturesque visual journey is trapped within a repeating, inward looking circuit. Instead of a romantic ruin, framing or punctuating the view, we're offered a

[183] Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American landscape and painting* (Oxford University Press,1980), pp. 37-38,

94 **John Gerard**, *Animated Scene (Oil Field)* (2007). Real-time 3D object. Images from four different times: 6pm, 1st April 2009; 12am, 1st July 2009; 10am, 1st December 2009; 12pm, 1st January, 2010.

95 **Sanford Gifford**, *The Wilderness* (1860).

96 **Arkhip Kuindzhi**, *Landscape, The Steppe* (1890).

ruinous machine that never stops.[184] An eternal, transcendental view of nature is replaced by the pure linearity (or 'mystical oneness') of a computer program, echoed by the planarity of the prairie, an endlessness which Arkhip Kuindzhi poignantly tackled in his painting *The Steppe* (1890) [**96**]. Invisible data and algorithms create a disembodied dream, trapped behind a digital screen. The land is presented as an infinite standing-reserve of energy resources, to be exploited by technology without consequence.

*Animated Scene (Oil Field)* shows the exploitation of natural resources, yet, on the surface, hides the despoiling results. But this hiding (or screening) is what gives his work particular force. For such immersive film or gaming spectacles usually develop and end dramatically, or in online worlds like Second Life continuously change – in both cases serving as virtual distractions from the slow and messy real world. Indeed, the simulated, interactive world of Second Life allows its participants' avatars to fly or teleport through landscapes that aim towards an idealised version of the real world. Dana Leibsohn, for the most part, celebrates the potential for simulated worlds to expand conceptions of what landscape is:

> [T]hese virtual spaces warrant theoretical engagement because, as they grow and change, the technologies that make them possible press upon the very concepts that allow landscapes to show themselves. And, in so doing, they insist upon a persistent redefinition of that which is 'natural,' that which makes knowable, and that which we recognize as the phenomenology of place.[185]

*Animated Scene (Oil Filed)* reveals the artificiality of these scenarios through relentless monotony. It's as if the nodding-donkey, through its pumping motion, is actually turning the landscape and the globe – and in terms of humanity's reliance on fossil fuels, it (virtually) is. The supposed immateriality and eternity of the digital provides the ultimate barrier (or screen) against facing up to nature's potential destruction – In effect, *screen as (replacement picture of) landscape* – allowing the real landscape to slip out of consciousness.[186] Yet, of course, networks, computers and screens across the globe use huge amounts of natural resources in their construction and energy supply.

Gerard's work questions technology with technology. CGI spectacle has supplanted reality, offering an idealised vision of a situation where machines exist in a state of perpetual motion. The circling seamlessness of the program – the spinning oil well, viewpoint and globe – suggests a divine order, a platonic purity of form to which the audience might become mesmerised. *Animated Scene (Oil Filed)*

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[184] In contrast to Allan Otte's crashed vehicles.

[185] Dana Leibsohn, 'On the Limes of Landscape,' *Landscape Theory*, Ed. Rachael Ziady DeLue, James Elkins (Routledge, 2008), pp. 250-251.

[186] A theme already suggested by Marian Coutts's *Everglade*.

would seem to question Heidegger's citing of the poet Hölderlin's words in his essay The Question Concerning Technology:

> *But where danger is, grows*
> *The saving power also.*[187]

This 'saving power' exists alongside technology's implementation of scientific empiricism and economic determinism in the ordering of the world. In the process of building a 'world picture', deeper, existential experience – 'the call of a more primal truth'[188] – is ever more concealed to humanity. Yet for Heidegger the 'saving power' cannot be banished, as to question is 'the piety of thought,'[189] where 'human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it.'[190] By this he means that technology has its roots in the ancient Greek word *techné*, which was also shared by the fine arts: 'Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *techné*. And the poiésis of the fine arts was also called *techné*.'[191] Thus the essence of technology is born of a questioning after truth shared by all the 'arts,' before a divergence of science and the fine arts where *techné* would become the exclusive claim of science.

> Thus questioning, we bear witness to the crisis that in our sheer preoccupation with technology we do not yet experience the coming to presence of technology, that in our sheer aesthetic-mindedness we no longer guard and preserve the coming to presence of art. Yet the more questioningly we ponder the essence of technology, the more mysterious the essence of art becomes.[192]

Gerard's work encourages such questioning precisely because of its merging of technology and art within hyper-real simulations that might seem to conceal the essence of both – thereby highlighting the danger. For Jean-François Lyotard, writing four decades later, with the near-hegemony of information technology a reality, access to 'a more primal truth' is almost entirely blocked by the 'inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development.'[193] He speaks of a 'familiar and unknown guest' – an internal,

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[187] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1950), trans.William Lovitt (Harper and Row, 1977), p.34.

[188] Ibid., p. 28.

[189] Ibid., p. 35.

[190] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

[191] Ibid., p. 34.

[192] Ibid., p. 35.

[193] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Polity Press, 1991), p. 2.

97 **John Gerard**, *Oil Stick Work (Angelo Martinez/Richfield, Kansas)* (2008). Real-time 3D projection. Images from four different times: 6pm, 1st April 2009; 12am, 1st July 2009; 10am, 1st December 2009; 12pm, 1st January, 2010.

**98** The Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas.

**99** **Kasimir Malevich**, *Black Square* (1915), oil on canvas.

inhuman sublime, which can be revealed by art, through which 'the soul is returned to the agitated zone between life and death,'[194]

Another work by Gerard, *Oil Stick Work (Angelo Martinez/Richfield, Kansas)* (2008) [**97**], shows a wider circular transit of a white agricultural building with grain silos. Perhaps four times further away, the circling viewpoint moves as fast as a car. The building is slowly being painted black by a (just discernable) human figure on a scaffold, the Angelo Martinez of the title. Gerard has programmed (enslaved?) this individual to systematically paint the whole building with black oil sticks, completing one square meter every day. Working from dawn to dusk, Angelo will complete his unenviable, pre-programmed task in thirty years since he commenced – in the year 2038.

Aside from a negative reading, akin to the myth of Sisyphus, his painterly toils could be seen in an existential, Beckettian light, or even a Zen-like ritual – a suspension of time in the present moment. Painting the barn black hints at the metaphysical – the black monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey,* Mark Rothko's chapel paintings [**98**], and perhaps most especially, Kasimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) [**99**].[195]

Yet his Mexican name hints at a more sinister reading: the exploitation of migrant workers. The absurdity of the job hints at sheer malice, akin to the characters in Paul Auster's The Music of Chance who are forced to build a meaningless wall to pay off a gambling debt. Angelo exists in a 'zone between life and death,' in the sense that his job is purgatorial, immune from rescue, interference or (external or internal) agitation. Although the sun and moon traverse the sky following seasonal change, we're offered an unchanging scene, apart from Angelo's activity, which is imperceptible within the short time-span of normal viewing. This suggests that this kind of human exploitation will still be a reality in thirty years, but also it hints that it's possibly a situation within which all humanity will be enslaved – if it isn't already.

Gerard displays his work either as immersive wall-filling data projections, or on screens-as-objects: flat-screen television monitors. Due to the sophistication of the CGI techniques, viewers can be confused as to whether the scenes are filmed for real (which would involve impossibly smooth tracking shots), or artificially generated. The intertwined relationship between nature and technology is thus replicated in the verisimilitude of its reproduction, pushing the relationship of nature, technology and art to a point where it challenges Emmanuel Kant's: 'Nature is beautiful because it looks like Art; and Art can only be called beautiful if we are conscious of it as Art while yet it looks like Nature.'[196]

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[194] Ibid, p.100.

[195] 'The series of paintings of black squares ... were for Malevich almost literal means to transcend the Earth and to travel to space.' Charlie Gere, *Art, Time and Technology* (Berg, 2006), p. 74.

[196] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1793), trans. J.H. Bernard, *Art in Theory 1648-1815* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008), p. 785.

Automated visual spectacle, without the influence of the other senses, is the limited, inhuman vortex by which Gerard captures the audience's attention, echoing Jonathan Crary:

> The issue of the automatic is crucial within the specifically modern problem of attention: it poses the notion of absorped states that are no longer related to an *interiorization* of the subject, to an intensification of a sense of selfhood ... attention as a depthless interface simulates and displaces what once might have been autonomous states of self-reflection or a *sens intime*. The logic of spectacle prescribes the production of separate, isolated, but not introspective individuals.[197]

It could be argued that Gerard's use of different scales of display present viewers with alternate readings of the works, through varying degrees of spectacle. But the true sense of immersion would seem to be in the abstract (and hence introspective) realm – the intriguing notion that Angelo's or the nodding donkey's toils continue invisibly in the hardware-software 'black box' when the works aren't being screened. This realisation tells of the invisible workings of the global capitalist system, relentlessly exploiting the earth's resources – invisible, at least, to people on the privileged side of the dodgy equation. By this very token, through their relentless cyclical loops, geographic settings and immateriality – 'a universality without concept, a finality without end and a pleasure devoid of interest'[198] – Gerard's works indicate that 'some something'[199] is missing – that the saving power and a sense of the sublime is still there for the audience. This is to be found in the imagining of Angelo's simulated communion with the eternal instant; his attending to pure 'presence,' the 'nuance and timbre'[200] of matter with his black oil stick on the wall of the barn, toying with Malevich's pronouncement: 'With the most primitive means the artist creates something which the most ingenious and efficient technology will never be able to create.'[201]

Angelo inhabits the screen in a real-time landscape simulation, rendered by the lightning speed of a computer program. His predicament warns of future entrapment, where a sense of loss, and hence landscape, has been computed out of human memory.

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[197] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (MIT Press, 2001), pp. 79.

[198] Jacques Rancière's elaboration on the nihilism engendered by Kantian critique of the Beautiful Ideal. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2004), trans. Steven Corcoran (Polity Press, 2009), p.88.

[199] Jean-François Lyotard, Ibid, p.140.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Kasimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*, trans. Howard Dearstyne (Paul Theobald & Company, 1959), p. 78.

**100** **Christiane Baumgartner**, *Lisbon I* (2001),
woodcut print on Japanese paper, 90 x 120 cm.

**101** **Christiane Baumgartner**, *Lisbon II* (2001),
woodcut print on Japanese paper, 90 x 120 cm.

**102** **Christiane Baumgartner**, *Lisbon III* (2001),
woodcut print on Japanese paper, 90 x 120 cm.

**103** **Christiane Baumgartner**, *Lisbon IV* (2001),
woodcut print on Japanese paper, 90 x 120 cm.

**Forest**

Christiane Baumgartner laboriously traverses the surface of her chosen images with the blade of a chisel or knife. They are pictures of human transit across post-industrial landscapes: a road as if seen through the lens of a traffic surveillance camera; a glimpse of the landscape seen through a car windscreen; or a fleeting peripheral view of an unremarkable scene of woodland or industrial estate rushing past.

The arbitrary framing of her large-scale woodcut prints ranges between the de-centered photographic, the functionally situated webcam, and the random video-still. This referencing of the mechanical eye is even more profoundly articulated by the striated surfaces of her black on white prints. The low-resolution horizontal grooves, carved into blocks of wood, present an imperfect equivalent to the electronic scanning of the analogue television signal. The implied speed of vehicular travel, facilitated by the highway, is thus held suspended between two extremes of visual communication: the hand-made slowness of woodcarving, and the virtual instantaneity of the electronic. This dissonance is further exacerbated by often working in series, where subsequent pictures appear to be taken from video stills only a matter of a few frames or seconds apart, for example in *Lisbon I-IV* (2001) **[100-103]**.

Reading Baumgartner's prints as simply updating the historic art of the woodcut to incorporate contemporary subject matter and media would be incorrect, for analogue video is itself an increasingly outmoded medium. The grid-based raster screen is still 'envisaged' by the encoded signal as a succession of linear scans repeated many times a second, yet with the pixellated LCD or LED screen, the scan rates are far higher, and malfunction results in dropped pixels or blocking artefacts – not flaws and slippages in horizontal tracking, ghosting, and vertical hold. The scanned lines of the prints not only draw on the nostalgic feel of the scanning of analogue video, but also the suggestion of wood grain – an emergent visual memory, as if from the wooden printing block itself. Environmental concerns are materialised with an exchange between fugitive images of marginal or industrialised landscapes through the mediation of wood, both as material means and symbolic form – the pictorial re-emergence of the fossilised primeval forest or the lost garden.

Laura Marks uses the term 'haptic visuality' (conceived of by the art historian Alois Riegl)[202] as a tool to explore contemporary film and video art, where 'the eyes

[202] Riegl contrasted the 'haptic' in Egyptian art, where figuration adheres to the picture plane, and the optical in Roman Art, where illusory space became predominant – a model later perfected by renaissance perspective and lens-based media.

themselves function as an organ of touch.'[203] Echoing Merleau-Ponty's 'visible and tangible belong to the same world,'[204] she argues that in the context of lens-based and CGI's almost exclusive adherence to immersive, perspectival illusionism, the tactile qualities of images should be cherished: 'It is timely to explore how a haptic approach might rematerialize our objects of perception, especially now that optical visuality is being refitted as a virtual epistemology for the digital age.'[205] The haptic and optical are not separate ways of perceiving the world, or a representation of it, but form a continuum, where 'both are involved, in a dialectical movement from far to near, from solely optical to multisensory. And obviously we need both kinds of visuality: it is hard to look closely at a lover's skin with optical vision; it is hard to drive a car with haptic vision.'[206]

Baumgartner's prints engender an extreme haptic visual encounter with the contiguous surfaces of analogue video, the hand-carved wood, and the suggestion of wood grain, yet they are landscapes that would normally tend towards an optical rendering – at least in the contemporary context. Yet the diffused, all-over surfaces of impressionist painting, where physical brushstrokes and additive use of colour replace the illusionism of linear perspective, would seem to offer a close art historical equivalent to Baumgartner's work, with their tangible painted surfaces. The poet Jules Laforgue summarises the impressionist approach to landscape:

> [A] natural eye forgets tactile illusions and their convenient dead language of line, and acts only in its faculty of prismatic sensibility. It reaches a point where it can see reality in the living atmosphere of forms, decomposed, refracted, reflected by beings and things, in incessant variation.[207]

Baumgartner's work offers a monochromatic Impressionism through printed physical (not visual) impressions. Her 'Prismatic sensibility' is a product of a virtually blind transcription process across the surface of wood, rather than a diffused agglomeration of impasto paint. The impressionists depicted the encroachment of industry and transport on the environment in some of their works, from Pissaro's *Lordship Lane Station, Dulwich* (1871) [**104**], to Monet's more industrialised *Gare Saint Lazare* (1877) [**105**].[208] Yet in Baumgartner's prints

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[203] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: sensuous theory and multisensory media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 2.

[204] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Intertwining – the Chiasm,' *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), (Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 134.

[205] Laura U. Marks, Ibid., p. xiii.

[206] Ibid., p. 3.

[207] Jules Laforgue, *Impressionism*, trans. William Jay Smith (Art News, May 1956), p. 43.

[208] J.M.W. Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed – the Great Western Railway* (1844) provides a closer analogy to Baumgartner's post-industrial atmospherics. Pissaro is used as a more typical example of French Impressionism's vibrant colour palette, which contrasts

104 **Camille Pissaro**, *Lordship Lane Station, Dulwich* (1871).

105 **Claude Monet**, *Gare Saint Lazare* (1877).

the atmospheric colour of impressionist painting is rendered utterly post-industrial through the smoke of a burnt forest, a lingering petrochemical smog-scape seen through blackened furrows of congealed carbon ink across a field of paper.

Marks is keen to foreground the materiality of film, video and the digital, as carriers of metaphorical meanings attached to the specificities of various media, concerning entropy, mortality and flesh, through works that predominantly feature interpersonal relationships and the human body. She links the disintegrating image with notions of mortality, which in the context of Baumgartner's work can be transferred to ideas around the disappearance of actual landscape and its supposed exhaustion, 'at least for the purposes of serious painting.'[209]

> Mourning the death of an image is far less traumatic, of course, than mourning a loved one. Yet I argue that engaging with a disappearing image has some results for the formation of subjectivity, or, precisely, a subjectivity that acknowledges its own dispersion. These works of disappearing images encourage the viewer to build an emotional connection to the medium itself. We are not asked to reject the images on their surfaces, themselves precious indexes of long-ago events, but to understand them to be inextricable from another body whose evanescence we witness now, the body of the medium.[210]

The three-armed forms of wind turbines are lost in a malevolent fog in Baumgartner's series *Fahrt II, 1-8* (2004) [**106-107**]. They could form a symbol of eco-friendly hope, but one almost lost to the thresholds of recognition. Their three ghostly, upright forms are like the crucifixes in a depiction of Calvary or Golgotha. The success of renewable energy is shown to be as fanciful as renewable life. We can only gasp or grasp at this glimmer of possibility.

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with realist intentions when it came to industrial settings, as opposed to more bucolic natural ones. [See the reproduced pages of Charles Harrison's 'On the Surface of Painting' in Touch Screen].

[209] W.J.T.Mtchell, *Landscape and Power* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 20.

[210] Laura U. Marks, Ibid., p. 109.

**106** **Christiane Baumgartner**, *Fahrt II, Nr. 5* (2004),
woodcut print on Kozo paper, 120 x 160 cm.

**107** **Christiane Baumgartner**, *Fahrt II, Nr. 6* (2004),
woodcut print on Kozo paper, 120 x 160 cm.

> The sun never sets on the cyberspatial empire; somewhere on the globe, at any hour, an electronic retina is receiving light, converting sunbeams into a stream of ones and zeros. ... If the Internet and World Wide Web represent the augmentation of collective memory, then webcameras are a set of wired eyes, a digital extension of the human faculty of vision.[211]

Digital raster grids are a continuation of 'cartographic grids in general,'[212] which for Svetlana Alpers, 'must be distinguished from, not confused with, the perspectival grid. The projection is, one might say, viewed from nowhere. Nor is it to be looked through. It assumes a flat working surface.'[213] In contrast to the 'renaissance perspective grid, they do not share the positioned viewer, the frame, and the definition of the picture as a window through which an external viewer looks.'[214] 'The Art of Describing,' by which Alpers characterises seventeenth century Dutch painting (especially still life), is opposed to renaissance perspective through its:

> attention to many small things versus a few large ones; light reflected off objects versus objects modelled by light and shadow; the surface of objects, their colors and textures, dealt with rather than their placement in a legible space; an unframed image versus one that is clearly framed; one with no clearly situated viewer compared to one with such a viewer.[215]

Martin Jay associates 'The Art of Describing' with a scientific, empiricist urge, one at odds with 'Cartesianism with its faith in a geometricalized, rationalized, essentially intellectual concept of space...'[216] It is associated more to Alberti's grid or *velo*, the framed veil of threads used to map a scene, rather than Brunelleschi's system of artificial perspective, as Jay expands: 'This new concept of space was geometrically isotropic, rectilinear, abstract and uniform.'[217] The monocular viewer configured by perspective is replaced by an emphasis on 'the prior existence of a

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[211] Thomas J. Campanella, 'Eden By Wire: Webcameras and the telepresent landscape.' in *The Visual Culture Reader* (Routledge, 1998), p. 264.

[212] Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 138.

[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid.

[215] Ibid., p.44.

[216] Martin Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity,' *Vision and Visuality.* Ed. Hal Foster (Dia Art Foundation, 1988), p. 13.

[217] Ibid., p. 6.

world of objects depicted on the flat canvas, a world indifferent to the beholder's position in front of it.'[218]

Of course, Jay's and Alpers's two scopic regimes of 'Cartesian Perspectivalism' and 'The Art of Describing' may seem anachronistic from our remediated present, where these visual modes are seamlessly intertwined by the digital camera, computer simulations, or digital after-effects (Andrew Benjamin's *after-effect* relations between painting and photography fully automated, remediated, and sublimated). Yet outside of scientific uses of photography and imaging, which fit the cartographic empiricism of 'The Art of Describing,'[219] there is a type of landscape orientated digital photograph or video that adheres to the distanced, indifferent recording of visual information: the electronic surveillance image.

To call this a type or genre of image would be to bring under one umbrella a vast range of scenarios, variously covert, intrusive, instructive, or preventative; encompassing interior and exterior spaces, private or public, and street-level or aerial viewpoints. But their common feature is their placing in a fixed position, optimised to capture the information required over extended periods of time. Of course, some cameras can pan and zoom, or might be mobile. But these should be categorised as spy-cameras, as they are controlled by the prying eye of a human, or at least guided by pattern recognition and other smart software – all in the service of collective (in)human hierarchies of control and suppression.[220]

Landscape web-cameras operate at the more benign end of the surveillance spectrum, simply relaying information about traffic conditions to the public, and in a more general sense, weather conditions – a facility accessed by potential tourists to holiday destinations from a Floridian beach to a Coloradoan ski resort. Cameras can be in place for years, faithfully recording information from one fixed framing position, through day and night, through summer and winter, come rain, wind and snow. Although Internet connection speeds now allow for a succession of images closer to the 25fps of video – a more immediate sense of telepresence[221] – their

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[218] Ibid., p. 12.

[219] E.g. astronomical telescopes, satellite photographs, microscopes, X-rays, MRI scans, etc.

[220] Often exceeding the inhumanity of the forces they are meant to be countering. Interactive digital environments (including many innovative artworks) incorporate similar technology, offering supposedly heightened tele-presence. It is the opinion of this writer that these fall dangerously close to the alienating effects of surveillance, masked under a utopian vision of interconnectedness – usually controlled by one individual, organisation or corporation.

[221] 'Admittedly, webcamera technology as it exists today affords only the most basic variety of telepresence. The simple observation of distant scenes, even in real time, hardly satisfies most definitions of telepresence.' Thomas J. Campanella, Ibid., p. 268.

default mode is to capture change in the scene after a matter of a few seconds (especially with traffic cameras), to several minutes.[222]

Webcam images (and many forms of surveillance footage) are neither distinctly still images nor parts of a moving continuum. They have an ambiguous temporal status, either comprising a kind of time-lapse film that will never be made, or still photographs in an interminable exhibition of infinitesimal differences from one image to the next.[223]

With remotely situated landscape webcams the viewer can have a curious sense of intruding on a private natural world, in a way, as if viewed from nowhere, where the likelihood is that they will be the only viewer of a particular image that will be forever lost, or added to a phantasmagorical archive of data never to be trawled. As exemplars of images fulfilling The Art of Describing paradigm, landscape web-cam images have a curious sense of authenticity, as much born of their arbitrary framing of the landscape (a functional aesthetic rather than a picturesque one), as it is due to their low-resolution and proneness to partial malfunction – errors that actually engender faith in the fact of the mediated real event. They offer the opposite of the transient made timeless, a quality cherished in landscape painting (Poussin to Monet) or landscape photography (Anselm to Robert Adams). With these quasi-photographs or quasi-films, the timeless – in the sense of unwavering technical constancy – is made transient within a single frame, in the face of an endless pool of pictures.[224] The expected visitor's engagement is fleeting, as the sites are merely being used to check weather conditions or to gain a rudimentary impression of a place.

The technical impoverishment of these images might seem totally at odds with Mitchell's 'familiar categories that divide the genre of landscape painting into subgenres – notions such as the Ideal, the Heroic, the Pastoral, the Beautiful, the

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[222] Rather than Internet speeds being prohibitive to faster refresh rates, it could be data storage that is possibly more of an issue. But here again, there is a question; for a 1GB memory stick (now, in 2012, the basic unit of digital storage) can hold 20,000 50KB images. So, it just seems a matter of expediency: web-cams are just there to relay information, and there are too many variables that can effect the quality of the image, so they're kept rudimentary, usually using the most basic and cheapest of cameras.

[223] Some websites do assemble images from the previous day's collection into time-lapse films, but these are rare exceptions. Film stills share a similar ambiguous status, not due to intermittency, but their (often uncertain) staging as still photographs – production shots, rather than prints of individual frames taken from a moving continuum. In this regard, I have not been able to verify whether the film-still from Farenheit 451 [1] was taken as a staged production shot, or was taken from an actual frame of the film.

[224] An example of a website that pools webcams from around the state of Colorado: www.dickgilbert.com/coloradocams.htm. Rachel Reupke's artistic intervention with the web-cam phenomenon, the fictional resort of *Pico Mirador* (2003), was the focus of a deleted chapter of this thesis: www.picomirador.org

**108** **Susan Collins**, *Fenlandia* at Sutton Gault.
Selection of images from May-June 2004, recorded over a period of 2h 35m.

Sublime, and the Picturesque.'[225] Yet with closer scrutiny landscape webcam images harbour thematic ideals and realist effects akin to both the sublime, with their notionally eternal, unflinching gaze, whatever the weather, and impressionist visual effects and themes, with their low-resolution, data-compressed return to the same scene at different times of the day.[226]

Over the last eight years, Susan Collins has installed webcams in various environments framing a range of scenes: from apparently non-descript countryside to more picturesque landscapes, from urban or industrial settings, such as business parks, to seascapes. Between 2004 and 2006, her first camera was situated at Sutton Gault in Cambridgeshire, looking across a canal to the flat Fenland countryside beyond [**108**].

Her technical intervention with the camera is very simple. Starting at the top left corner, the pictures are built, pixel-by-pixel, in horizontal rows, moving slowly over many hours, down the digital raster until the bottom is reached. The astonishing visual effects are due the accumulated record of transient meteorological conditions on the final picture, the images offering an insistent confusion in their reading. A sense of pictorial oneness is maintained because the horizontal bandings of dark and light somehow echo fluctuating effects of light due to meteorological phenomena (long shadows or breaks in cloud), and a whole host of artistic, photographic, electronic, or digital effects: limitations in photographic exposure, technical glitches in the electronic image, motion blur, symbolist exaggerations of colour, and formalist abstraction. In many and various ways they evoke the whole history of landscape representation. For example, they distil time in an idealist mode, offering nebulous symbolic associations, connected to painting's attraction to the narrative potential of fleeting meteorological events, like the sun breaking through clouds, or an approaching or passing storm. Two dramatically different contemporaneous versions of this can be seen in Albert Bierstadt's *Storm in the Mountains* (1870) [**109**] and John Frederick Kensett's *Passing off of the Storm* (1872) [**110**].

By compressing the changes in weather and light over many hours into one picture, the viewer cannot help but read these fluctuations through the illusory depth of the landscape, across the receding plane. Starting in the foreground at the bottom, the viewer travels back in time as they advance upwards into the illusory distance – a picturesque journey through space *and time*. Collins's landscapes share the temporal extension necessary for the making of a painting, but here it is combined with the regimented procession of rows, from left to right and top to

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[225] W.J.T.Mtchell, Ibid, p.14.

[226] Data compression and Impressionism share a functional prerogative. The impressionist imperative was to capture the essence of a scene as quickly as possible with a restricted palette of colours, regarding the scene as a whole, employing visible brushstrokes of a similar size, later formalised by Seurat and Cezanne. Compressed digital photographs function as proto-paintings, abstracting and simplifying visual information, creating painterly effects with standardised pixels.

**109** **Albert Bierstadt**, *Storm in the Mountains* (ca. 1870), oil on canvas.

**110** **John Frederick Kensett**, *Passing off of the Storm* (1872), oil on canvas.

**111** **Susan Collins**, *Fenlandia* at Bracknell (2005-6),
selected image recorded over 21h 20m.

**112** **Susan Collins**, *Fenlandia* at Cambourne Business Park (2005-6),
selected image recorded over 21h 20m.

**113** **Susan Collins**, *Fenlandia* at Greenham Common (2006-6),
selected image recorded over 21h 20m.

bottom, like the flow of text across and down a page. The photographs can be systematically read and taken as a whole at the same time.[227]

Collins's project is weirdly poised between a structural purity – the constant overwriting of information displayed as live feeds to a dedicated screen or over the Internet – and the selection of single images (out of hundreds) with which to make photographic prints, which might harbour resonances within the history of landscape representation, or simply have a particular visual appeal.

Very soon in the development of her project she imposed a formula that increased the separation from a human time scale (the two and a half hours which might correspond to the time of a picnic), to an inhuman one, slowing down the passage of the traversing pixel to exactly one every second. The earliest mass-produced webcams, such as the Macintosh QuickCam (1994), shared the resolution of 320 x 240 pixels. Collins's adherence to this format has remained constant, despite developments in camera technology. Recording one pixel every second, the 76,800 pixels take 21h 20m to scan. Thereby taking exactly eight days for nine entire images to materialise.

In 2005 Collins added further cameras to her inventory: one looking out over a suburban car park in Bracknell [**111**]; another which borrowed images from an actual surveillance camera at Cambourne Business Park in Cambridgeshire [**112**]; and one looking across Greenham Common in Berkshire – valiantly contested home to American nuclear missiles through the 1980s [**113**]. Collectively titled *Fenlandia*, the Arcadian title belies an undercurrent of human interaction with the landscape. This is most immediately obvious in the Bracknell images, where the dark bands corresponding to nighttime are flooded with artificial sodium light. But the technological exploitation of landscape is actually most profound in the very possibility of filming at Sutton Gault, for it is situated in the heart of Fenland, an area that would have been marsh before canals drained it for agricultural use.

Extending the photographic moment to almost the length of a day engenders more intrusive visual effects due to the representation of night in the continuous stream of automated images. The width of these dark bands fluctuates over the year, as the ratio between the lengths of day and night changes between solstices. They are pictorial voids in the images – event horizons, often fringed by an intense turquoise corresponding to dawn or the orange of a sunset. They can frame the view as a cinematic letterbox, or present the shadow of a partial physical barrier to the scene beyond. Very occasionally, the passing of the moon is sometimes captured within the black of night, working to give a certainty of depth in these paradoxical perceptual voids.

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[227] Fiona Banner's text-based works share a similar property, yet one coming from an opposing remediated direction. *The Desert* (1994) is her written account of watching the film Lawrence of Arabia. The many thousands of words are printed as one large landscape-format page. From a distance the grey field of barely unreadable text has the quality of a desert – a shimmering mirage of granular almost-nothingness.

**114** **Susan Collins**, *Glenlandia*. Two images from September 2005, recorded over a period of 21h 20m.

115 **Susan Collins**, *Glenlandia*. Two images from October 2005, recorded over a period of 21h 20m.

116 **Susan Collins**, *Glenlandia*. Two images from February 2006, recorded over a period of 21h 20m.

117 **Susan Collins**, *Glenlandia*. Two images from June 2006, recorded over a period of 21h 20m.

Perhaps the most striking images arise out of days where more profound changes of weather occur, meaning that the landscape has a rich diversity of bandings. Yet they still have the pictorial integrity of a notionally captured instant at the same time as a mechanised record of the day's proceedings.[228]

Later in 2005, in a project titled *Glenlandia*, another camera was installed in a landscape with more striking associations with the picturesque tradition, the beautiful vista presented by Loch Faskally in the Scottish Highlands [**114-117**]. In the foreground a fringe of grassy shoreline stretches before the loch and the forested hills beyond. The archive of images shows that the level of water in the lake rises and falls, as a log or rock in the foreground becomes more or less submerged, or the water is completely drained. But rather than a tidal loch, this is actually a man-made one – a giant reservoir created by a hydro-electricity dam at Pitlochry, built in 1947-50.

Through the *Glenlandia* archive, periods of calm where the loch reflects the hills and sky are contrasted, sometimes within the same image, with periods where the surface of the water is ruffled. From a distance the effect is surprisingly naturalistic. The horizontally banded digitised noise, corresponding to disturbed periods, resembles a certain kind of play of light over lakes. The water reflects the landscape and sky above a number of hours later, increasing as the scanning travels further down the image. In some pictures this gives rise to anomalies due to the changing angle of the sun or clouding over. Mitchell explains the attraction to scenes with lakes by way of analogy to the human act making of representations: 'The reflection exhibits Nature representing itself to itself, displaying an identity of the Real and the Imaginary that certifies the reality of our own images.'[229] In the *Glenlandia* works, nature is 'representing itself to itself,' but with a temporal delay. This sluggishness by which the light has reached the image is difficult to conceptualise. The lake's functioning as a mirror seems to insist on concurrency. This is something Nicolas Poussin played with in *Landscape with a Calm* (1650-51) [**118**], as T.J. Clarke observes:

> The real sky and its reflection don't 'question' one another, or contradict one another's signals. They don't register as not belonging together. Even when a viewer gets interested in what they do not share – what is and isn't mirrored in

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[228] The relatively gentle tonal variations through all of Collins's webcam work, compared to actual brightness, is due to an automated equivalent to human perceptual constancy – the modulated exposure of the camera, depending on atmospheric light conditions. Automatic exposure mechanises Helmoltz's theory of human perceptual constancy in his essay the Relation of Optics to painting (1871) – an important influence on impressionist painting – where the extreme contrasts of brightness projected onto the retina must be translated 'into another scale of sensitiveness, which belongs to a different degree of impressibility of the observing eye.'

[229] W.J.T.Mtchell, *Landscape and power* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 15

**118** **Nicolas Poussin**, *Landscape with a Calm* (1650-51).

**119** **Katsushika Hokusai**, *Mount Fuji Reflected in a Lake* (1834).

the lake – there is always a way in which the water's recapitulation of the landscape is entirely plausible.[230]

Hokusai's *Mount Fuji Reflected in a Lake* (1834) [**119**] shows the first known representation of a landscape reflection in a Japanese print.[231] Mount Fuji appears as a ghost of itself – a spatially and temporally shifted memory of its winter covering of snow.

The *Fenlandia* and *Glenlandia* images, through their extending of time away from the subjective or idealised moment, distil seasonal and astronomical timescales, thereby persisting in tracing nature's 'essential structures on our perceptual apparatus.'[232] They are time-lapse pictures that merge the ideals of a transcendentalist approach to nature – timelessness contained in the tiny encoded format of 320x240 pixels – with an empiricist one, where the speed of light is temporally refracted by a procession of pixellated moments.

Collins describes her *Fenlandia* and *Glenlandia* projects as 'pixel landscapes exploring the relationship between landscape and technology over time.'[233] This statement brings into question where technology begins and ends, and what constitutes human, meteorological, geological and technological timescales. Gerhard Richter's *Sils* series of Alpine landscapes contrasts similar timescales, but with paint applied to photographs [**120**]. There is the photographic moment (as captured on film and then its chemical enlargement); the fluid, chance-ridden application of oil paint; meteorological time scales of falling snow and the passage of the sun; and geological ones (mountain formation and erosion).

In Collins's work, landscape and technology's relationship is shown to be multifaceted and entangled. On the macro scale of landscape, dams and canals compete with geological timescales of land formation. But also, the slowed-down micro-electronic timescale haltingly re-enacts the imperceptible scanning of the analogue television screen, or digitised raster grid: the rectangular field of the screen in effect being harvested furrow by furrow for pictorial information – an analogy with agricultural technology. In terms of perception, the accrual of information is on a glacial time scale compared to the human gaze, presenting the notional sublime of an extended, unblinking gaze. Yet, as Sean Cubitt observes, in regard to Collins's work, 'the arrival of each pixel brings with it a sense that to sample the world, much as Monet undertook, is both homage and submission to cyclical times that logically and biologically precede the human.'[234] *Fenlandia* and *Glenlandia*, with their Arcadian titles, configure a new temporality for Cubitt, 'because it

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[230] T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: an experiment in art writing* (Yale University Press, 2006), p. 19.

[231] According to Matthi Forrer in *Hokusai: Prints and Drawings* (Prestel, 1991).

[232] Mitchell, Ibid.

[233] http://www.susan-collins.net/fenlandia

[234] Sean Cubitt, *Digital Landscapes and nature-morte*, p. 6. (A paper for 'Reinventing the Medium,' AAANZ Melbourne Conference 8 December 2006).

**120** **Gerhard Richter**, *Sils* (1980s/90s) photograph with applied paint.

**121** **Paul Cézanne**, *Lac d'Annecy*, 1896. Oil on canvas.

abandons the appeal to immortaltiy (the sublime) or the future (romanticism) in favour of finding its ethical ground in the present and its negotiation. As potential, the future is no longer remote but immanent...'[235] Oppositions between the instantaneity of the photographic and the timelessness of classical painting, between the empiricism of a scientific document, and the extrapolated impressionism of the fluctuation of light through a day, are short-circuited. Physical weather, a chaotic, mobile phenomenon, is encoded by a slowly advancing pixel into its noisy electronic counterpart – a kind of technological weather, generated by a simple spatiotemporal pictorial rule.

By producing digital photographic prints on a large scale the anomalous forms generated between subsequent rows is striking, creating sumptuous pixellated textures. Akin to impressionist painting, it is possible for the viewer to work out the process of their construction, pixel by pixel, in place of brushstrokes. Yet the subjective human gaze is temporally shifted into a register more at one with both meteorological and cosmic timescales. The pictures are full of narrative incident as the pixel journeys the screen. Yet there is a peculiar equilibrium here, as much to do with abstracted forms, colours and textures across the surface, as it is due to the interpretation of these phenomena into an imagining of the scene at any one particular time. The refracting prism slows light down on its way to the screen as if travelling across astronomical distances. This cumulative delay is something that can be read into the late landscapes of Cézanne, for example *Lac d'Annecy* (1896) [**121**], where, according to Merleau-Ponty:

> Nature itself is stripped of the attributes which make it ready for animistic communions: there is no wind in the landscape, no movement on the Lac d'Annecy; the frozen objects hesitate at the beginning of the world. It is an unfamiliar world in which one is uncomfortable and which forbids all human effusiveness.[236]

For Cézanne it was necessary, 'first, to forget all he had ever learned from science and, second, *through* these sciences to recapture the structure of the landscape as an emerging organism. To do this, all the partial views one catches sight of must be welded together; all that the eye's versatility disperses must be reunited...'[237] As surveillance images, devoid of human agency, Collins's pictures present a linear, airless, pre-programmed emergence of landscape; yet not one grounded in human experience. And whilst they can hardly be compared to Cézanne's struggle, where many canvases were abandoned or left unresolved, they both exhibit a challenge to the viewer in their spatiotemporal reading, which is

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[235] Ibid., p. 9.

[236] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt,' in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*. Ed. Galen A. Johnson (Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 66.

[237] Ibid., p. 67.

countered by the evident physicality of Cézanne's brushstrokes and the visibility of pixels in Collins's time-images, as she comments:

> The pixellation of the image was important to me, you can almost feel it being compressed and decompressed. There is honesty to it with the clunkiness of the technology at this particular stage of its development an intrinsic part of it. I am not sure if I would have made this work if the technology were at the stage where it was unseen or seamless.[238]

Seamlessness existed in the salon paintings with which Impressionism contended (e.g. Ingres), so now, with digital camera resolutions at the stage that Collins predicts, artistic choice must similarly intervene – by maintaining early digital technology's flawed picturing of the world in the spirit of realism, rather than through the distorting cloud of a fondness for the outmoded [**122**].[239]

With ever-higher screen and camera resolutions the pixel is banished to invisibility, bringing the digital photographic or video image in line with larger format photography and the intentions of renaissance perspective, as Lev Manovich summarises: 'Perspective presented the world as ready to be mastered, consumed, colonized – the world originating in the eye of the spectator.'[240] CGI works in the same geometric construction of space, configuring a virtual camera in relation to the scene, 'concerned with solidity and extension, with numbers and equivalents.'[241]

The link between impressionist technique and printing technology is ironically presented in Roy Lichtenstein's *Rouen Cathedral* works from 1969 [**123**], yet this

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[238] *Conversation with Susan Collins,* Carlo Zanni, Magazine électronique du CIAC, No 25, 2006.

[239] In his recent exhibition, *Beat the Champ*, in the Curve gallery at the Barbican (2011), Cory Arcangel presented a history of ten-pin bowling home video games from the late 70s to the early 2000s. The fourteen game consoles are hard-wire programmed to continually bowl foul balls into the gutter. His interest, and I would suggest ours as viewers, seems to wane as we approach the last giant screen projection in the chronology, as the games' simulations become ever more sophisticated. *Beat the Champ* suggests that after 2003 things just became too life-like. The pixelated image fades into folk memory – or just the diminutive scale of thumbnail images and a decreasing number of webcams.

[240] Lev Manovich, *The Engineering of Vision from Constructivism to Computers* ((PhD Dissertation, Visual and Cultural Studies, University of Rochester, 1993), p. 103.

[241] Ibid. Richard Shiff describes his misgivings about the immateriality of images: 'Within industrialised societies, and now even globally, the judgement of *degrees* of pictorial physicality has been complicated by new electronic technologies of visualisation, from television to the Internet. These are modes of picturing in which weightless images appear on less than paper-thin surfaces, receptive to electronically coded messages. It is as if we were experiencing books devoid of ink, paper, and binding, paintings lacking paint and canvas, and photographs that require neither negative nor print.' Richard Shiff, 'Realism of Low Resolution,' in *Impossible Presence – Surface and Screen in the Photogenic Era.* Ed. Terry Smith (2001, The University of Chicago Press), p. 144.

**122** **Cory Arcangel**, *Beat the Champ* (2011)
14-screen video-game installation at the Barbican Centre.

**123** **Roy Lichtenstein**, *Rouen Cathedral Set V* (1969).

**124** **Roy Lichtenstein**, *Landscape in Fog* (1996).

parodic, perhaps melancholic, take on imaging technology's prismatic distancing of human, atmospheric encounter is countered by a few late works by Lichtenstein, such as *Landscape in Fog* (1996) [**124**]. Similarly, the images from *Fenlandia* and *Glenlandia* operate by countering an empirical, mechanistic reading of the digital image by lending the humble pixel imagined physicality – a magnified truth to material – and even bestowing upon it accidental aesthetic agency.

Time is mapped onto a rigid frame, a permeable fabric through which the dimension of depth seeps. They are quasi-paintings, inviting the beholder to read them from afar and up close.[242] Collins's webcam images would seem to provide a new manifestation of the indexical, where each pixel points to a unique moment in time in the landscape transcribed to matrix. Yet perceived from a distance, the images nebulously point back through the pictorial soup of the landscape genre's history, conjuring memories of the classical, pastoral, picturesque, sublime, realism, Impressionism, and Expressionism, refracted through the prismatic lenses of painting, photographic and digital technologies.

[242] As Richard Shiff explains, referring to the work of Georges Seurat and Chuck Close: 'We approach a painting wishing to experience its unique surface as its maker did, within arm's length. We want to understand its artifice, how it was created. As a product of the hand, the medium of painting solicits inquisitive, low-resolution viewing, which converts large, integrated units of iconic imagery into small, constructive indexical marks. The tension between image (iconic product) and constitutive mark (indexical process) parallels that between observation and representation. In both instances, to establish a strict division would falsify the artistic experience.' Ibid., p. 148.

## Estrangement

*Enclosure*

In the earlier chapters, Prospect laid open the territory, hinting at points of confluence or divergence between the themes of screen and landscape. Foreground reversed the title, *landscape as screen* being taken as a formula for showing the complexities involved in approaching the subject between the perspectives of empiricism and aesthetics. Although expanding on the themes through the artist case study 'clearings,' the two chapters Screen and Landscape explored the subjects largely in isolation, yet with a sense of the companion theme looming alongside. This chapter presents a more thoroughgoing approach to the elusive meaning of *screen as landscape* – as a generative space, rather than a closed system. Remaining attentive to being in the-midst-of-things is the overarching thesis, whether that midst is in landscape or the screen – or the two intertwined.

> To inquire adequately into the power of landscape painting, we will need to explore and to re-examine critically the kinds of metaphors for which the genre has historically furnished occasions and to which it has given rise – among them metaphors of integration and dislocation, of presence and absence.[243]

> In modernity, the image has been fated to fight for visibility at a time when the conditions for the very achievement of appearance have themselves been determined by the decline (but not the disappearance) of art's great, historical generative structures – perspectival space, Baroque theatricality, and the Picturesque visual journey – and their displacement by the attractions, demands and limitations of two distinctly modern ones: the surface and the screen.[244]

SURFACE/SCREEN
PRESENCE/ABSENCE
INTEGRATION/DISLOCATION

Is it as simple or binary as this? Intriguingly, these terms can be shuffled around, as they seem to contain, imply, or configure their opposites. The screen as generator of illusory space can offer disembodied presence and virtual integration, just as a surface can be a sensuous trap or physical barrier for an absented or

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[243] Charles Harrison, 'The Effects of Landscape,' in *Landscape and Power* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[244] Terry Smith, 'Enervation, Viscerality,' in *Impossible Presence – Surface and Screen in the Photogenic Era.* Ed. Terry Smith (2001, The University of Chicago Press), pp. 1-3.

dislocated sense of self-awareness or orientation. Both media screen and landscape function between these oppositions.

Terry Smith argues that the surface's and the screen's respective qualities of viscerality and enervation (its tendency towards transparency) have 'intersected, separated, converged and diverged at different times and places throughout the modern period. We can be sure that they will continue to do so through postmodernity, perhaps no longer as a closed doublet, more as an incessant unravelling.'[245] But how will this unravelling proceed in the digital age, where viscerality and enervation are seamlessly simulated and integrated – remediated – by the screen interface, by its hardware and software?

The television or computer screen simulates visceral surfaces – pages of text, reproductions of paintings, etc. – as well as offering perspectival views through its 'windows,' whether full-screen or stacked.[246] What it does most successfully is contain diverging forms of visuality within a frame, as Anne Friedberg notes: 'The frame of the screen is a closed system, a primary container for inset secondary and tertiary frames that may recede in *mis en abyme,* but also converge to reunite within a grander but still bounded frame.'[247] As with framing a view of a landscape, there is a sense of what is outside of the frame of the screen, yet not a sense of receding depth – and not because of the screen's actual surface. There is no horizon to information, as the next page or scene is just a click of a mouse or channel surf away, not a journey or a turning of the head. As discussed in the chapter Landscape, both the screen and landscape manifest Heidegger's 'rule of Enframing,' which 'threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.'[248] The interactive media screen amplifies this threat through the illusion of there being no spatial limit, no horizon, which renders the screen's 'grander but still bounded frame' increasingly imperceptible. Heidegger's 'primal truth' equates with Gilles Deleuze's notion of cinema's frame fostering, rather than eliminating, a metaphysical 'out-of-field,' not just a perceptual one:

> In one case, the out-of-field designates that which exists elsewhere, to one side or around; in the other case, the out-of-field testifies to a more disturbing

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[245] Terry Smith, 'Enervation, Viscerality,' in *Impossible Presence – Surface and Screen in the Photogenic Era.* Ed. Terry Smith (2001, The University of Chicago Press), p. 33.

[246] 'In the mixed metaphor of the computer screen, the computer user is figuratively positioned with multiple spatial relations to the screen. 'Windows' stack *in front of* each other (if one is looking into the screen perpendicularly, as if through a window) or *on top of* each other (if one is looking into the screen as if its perpendicular is in a gravity-defying ninety-degree rotation of an angle overhead).' Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. 231-232.

[247] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. 241.

[248] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1955), trans. W. Lovitt (Harper and Row, 1977), p.28.

presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to 'insist' or 'subsist,' a more radical elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time.'[249]

With the media screen what is increasingly 'out-of-field' in a perceptual sense could be, to quote Lacan again, 'the depth of field, with all its ambiguity and variability, which is in no way mastered by me. It is rather it that grasps me, solicits me at every moment, and makes of the landscape something other than landscape, something other than what I have called a picture.'[250] Depth perception can thus provide a phenomenological key to any possible access to 'a more radical elsewhere' or 'primal truth.' It dwells between surface and screen, between viscerality and enervation. Can it be augmented rather than just simulated and enclosed by the screen's contiguous layers of information or immersive spectacles?

Landscape is an insistent presence in contemporary art, despite Mitchell's bleak outlook.[251] Its presence resists being attached to notions of presentness, of being of the moment – always finding resonances with its experiential and cultural history.[252] Also, landscape hasn't gone away as a potentially serious subject, especially over recent decades with the rise of environmentalism, and concerns about the disappearance of natural habitats and landscapes.

In more general terms, Smith argues that presence is an intrinsic property of art works, which transcends their time of production:

> [Presence] insists against its time as much as it emerges, necessarily, within it – against both art time and social time; that is, against art-historical inevitability and celebrity. These days, it is persistence against the call – perhaps imperative of surface – to sheer media, to the actuality of the white field, to an aesthetics of erasure, the implosive pull of the empty space, to, in fact, the nightmare of non-representation, the horror vacua which is at the heart of formalist modernism. It is also persistence against the call – driven, perhaps, by the demands of screen – toward dematerialisation, repetition, degeneration, fade,

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[249] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1- The Movement-Image* (1983), tr. Hugh Tomlinson & Babara Habberjam (Continuum, 2005), pp. 18-19.

[250] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964), trans. Alan Sheridan (Norton, 1981), p. 96.

[251] '[T]here is no doubt that the classical and romantic genres of landscape painting evolved during the great age of European Imperialism now seem exhausted, at least for the purposes of serious painting.' W.J.T.Mtchell, *Landscape and Power* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 20.

[252] Present Technology was the title for a two-day symposium hosted by the Contemporary Art Research Centre at Kingston University, in July 2010. It was organised by fellow doctoral student Emma Hart and myself. Emma came up with the inspired title, which confuses being physically present with the temporal present, or presentness. The introduction to my day appears in the companion volume Touch Screen.

> towards the state of infinite replay which is the horror at the heart of postmodernism.[253]

'Persistence against the call' of the logical endgames of modernity and post-modernity by attending to presence would seem to hold true not only to art works (in order to be appreciated as such), as Smith suggests, but also as a means of recovering landscape from the apparent inevitability of its physical 'erasure' (through economic and technological exploitation), conceptual 'degeneration' as a distinct idea or genre (through scientific empiricism), and cultural 'de-materialisation' (through urbanism and consequent romanticism).

For Robin Kelsey, '[L]andscape has been a technology to recognise our status as a species that does not belong.'[254] And for Jean-François Lyotard this sense of not belonging or estrangement is what engenders the very notion of landscape:

> There would appear to be a landscape whenever the mind is transported from one sensible matter to another, but retains the sensorial organization appropriate to the first, or at least a memory of it. The Earth seen from the moon for a terrestrial. The countryside for the townsman; the city for the farmer. ESTRANGEMENT would appear to be a precondition for landscape.[255]

Landscape's genesis as a distinct idea (or image) depends on a separation from the land, away from a direct dependence on it for survival, and multisensory, absorbed physical engagement with it – from being-in-the-world. Landscape is a mental abstraction, not a material actuality, to which the dualisms of self and world, or culture and nature are related. If landscape is 'the homeland of our thoughts,' according to the phenomenologist Tim Ingold, for Jean-Luc Nancy, it 'is the land of those who have no land, who are uncanny and estranged, who are not a people, who are at once those who have lost their way and those who contemplate the infinite – perhaps their infinite estrangement.'[256] These definitions for landscape might seem to oppose one another, but the very idea of a homeland depends on initial dislocation, an extension of the primal separation of the infant from its mother.[257]

This movement away from a homeland towards estrangement seems to work in the opposite direction for the media screen. Instead of estrangement born of

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[253] Terry Smith, 'Enervation, Viscerality,' in *Impossible Presence – Surface and Screen in the Photogenic Era.* Ed. Terry Smith (2001, The University of Chicago Press), p. 8.

[254] Robin Kelsey, 'Landscape as Not Belonging,' *Landscape Theory*, Ed. Rachael Ziady DeLue, James Elkins (Routledge, 2008), p. 207.

[255] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman.* Polity Press, 1991, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Polity Press, 1991), p.183.

[256] Ibid., p. 61.

[257] 'A baby must see its MOTHER's face as a landscape.' Lyotard, Ibid., p. 189.

dislocation, it aims towards total integration and simulated presence. Habituation and familiarity would appear to be the precondition of the media screen – yet this portends an infinite estrangement from the real world.

If the system, according to Lyotard, 'has the consequence of causing the forgetting of what escapes it,'[258] then the idea of landscape would seem to be resistant to this dynamic, where a sense of estrangement, a subjectivity engendered by separation, is experienced through a fluid combination of Harrison's 'metaphors of integration and dislocation, of presence and absence.'[259] Importantly, estrangement relies on the interplay of forgetting and remembering – a new environment or scene only perceivable through sensorial resemblances prompted by unfamiliarity. The reciprocal relationship between landscape and estrangement is a result of the texture and opacity of landscape as a medium (both actual and representational): its surfaces and depths, its multi-sensory atmospherics, its insistent, ineffable presence – and, most crucially, the paradoxical relationship between a longing for primal re-immersion and awareness of the impossibility of this.

Estrangement could be linked to the uncanny – the familiar made strange – or it could be closer to Martin Jay's thoughts about baroque visuality, which 'self-consciously revels in the contradictions between surface and depth, disparaging as a result any attempt to reduce the multiplicity of visual spaces into any coherent essence. ... As such, it was closer to what a long tradition of aesthetics called the sublime, in contrast to the beautiful, because of its yearning for a presence that can never be fulfilled.[260]

The hi-tech media screen, through the integration of visual and informational immediacy, threatens the generative contradictions between surface and illusory depth, presence and absence, which engender landscape in the broadest terms. As opposed to landscape, the screen has become a technology to recognise our status as a species that *does* belong. Yet this sense of belonging is incorporeal and dispersed, increasingly less fixed to particular places or the estranged memory of them.

## *Habitat*

According to Jay Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, animals and humans are attracted to locations of concealment in front of an open vista:

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[258] Lyotard, Ibid, p.18.

[259] Charles Harrison, 'The Effects of Landscape,' in *Landscape and Power* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[260] Martin Jay, *Scopic Regimes of Modernity. Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Dia Art Foundation, 1988), pp.17-18.

**125** Pictorial explanation of Jay Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, from: http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/~dmiall/travel/prospect.htm

**126** **Joseph Wright**, *Vesuvius in Eruption, with a View over the Islands in the Bay of Naples* (c.1776-80).

> [A]esthetic pleasure in landscape derives from the observer experiencing an environment favourable to the satisfaction of his biological needs. Prospect-refuge theory postulates that, because the ability to see without being seen is an intermediate step in the satisfaction of many of those needs, the capacity of an environment to ensure the achievement of this becomes a more immediate source of aesthetic satisfaction.[261]

Both being-in-the-world and being-in-the-image work towards the same aesthetic goal, as witnessed in picturesque painting compositions [**125**]. The screen image simply perfects a biological imperative, where the whole world can be seen, with the viewer remaining entirely invisible.

The invention of the telescope was a step on this path, but representation, through painting, photography and film perfects concealment through seeing through the eyes of others, mediated by various technologies. Aesthetic aspirations stemming from Appleton's theory still pertain, as witnessed in the continuing, digitally enhanced attraction to picturesque landscapes. Vision technologies permit safe access to sites of exposure or danger – to the notionally sublime or terrifying – from Joseph Wright's *Vesuvius in Eruption, with a view over the Islands in the Bay of Naples* (1776 – 1780) [**126**], to adrenalin-fuelled CGI spectacle, or appalling footage of the Japanese tsunami. The Internet simply expands the frequency and unpredictability of such encounters, whilst diminishing their affect through multiplicity and apparent safety.[262] The hi-tech screen truly is the ultimate prospect and refuge – but a refuge from what, if there are no hazards? As Appleton explains: 'To 'abolish' the hazard altogether is to deprive the prospect and the refuge of their meaningful roles, since they cannot be expected to react against a stimulus which is no longer there. [T]his is simply stating, in eighteenth-century terms, that prospect symbolism and refuge symbolism also demand a hazard symbolism to make them work.'[263]

So long as a sense of corporality and proprioception (the sense of the body's orientation in space, and the relative position of its parts) pertains, then spatial metaphors deriving from landscape, rather than information technology, persist. For landscape these include distance and proximity, up and down, sky and earth, as well as prospects, refuges, obstructions and hazards. Cyberspace is mapped topologically – an approach concerned with instantaneous connective properties

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[261] Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (John Wiley & Sons, 1975), p. 73

[262] 'Most of us say we admire something in the wild unpredictability of nature, yet choose to interact with it via safari in capsules that have all the comforts of home. Indeed, this mixture of the informationally unpredictable and the physically safe and convenient is as precise an ergonomic description as any of life online: head in the infinite, rear end in the chair, fingers just a tad closer to accessing the cosmos through keyboard or mouse than the refrigerator for a snack.' Paul Levinson, *The Soft Edge: a natural history and future of the information revolution* (Routledge, 1997), p. 148.

[263] Jay Appleton, *Ibid.*, p. 96.

(hyperlinks) rather than spatiotemporal distances (prospects), with information nodes (junctions) rather than stopping points or dwelling places (refuges).

The interconnected technological matrix, although being open to spatial metaphors, is incorporeal, so effectively hazard free. Although it is contained in physical apparatuses (computers), its spatial entities of network, node, link, and coordinate, are virtual or pre-spatial, akin to the mental apparatus of the brain, yet without a centralised self or access point. An analogy within the landscape is transport and distribution infrastructure, another form in which computer architecture is often envisaged (e.g. data buses). Although physically present across the landscape, the imperatives of speed and functionality literally bypass experiences of being-in-the-world, as Marc Augé describes:

> Places and non-places are opposed (or attracted) like the words and notions that enable us to describe them. But the fashionable words – those that did not exist thirty years ago – are associated with non-places. Thus we can contrast the realities of *transit* (transit camps or passengers in transit) with those of residence or dwelling; the *interchange* (where nobody crosses anyone else's path) with the *crossroads* (where people meet); the *passenger* (defined by his *destination*) with the *traveller* (who strolls along his route...)[264]

The seductive pseudo-emancipation from the confines of geographical location challenges a sense of corporality, and by extension, landscape. Technological non-containment means that everything appears equally proximate and accessible under a mask of anonymity. But interconnection comes with controlling hierarchies, which breed shadow anxieties (hazards) of un-concealment or identity profiling. The cyber-spatial landscape offers illusory refuges and dubious prospects, where the prospect-refuge aesthetic diminishes to impoverished binary forms, for example between the apparent omnipotence offered by Google Earth and the personality profiled individualism of the Facebook page.

> *Don't you wonder sometimes*
> *'Bout sound and vision?*[265]

For Norman Bryson, the pictorial vanishing point configures a subjective one, where 'the only position for the viewing subject proposed and assumed by the image will be that of the Gaze, a transcendent point of vision that has discarded the body ... and exists only as a disembodied *punctum*.'[266] This configures Lacan's internal image-screen, which is emulated and externalised by the hi-tech screen

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[264] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: an introduction to supermodernity*, tr. John Howe (Verso, 2008), p. 86.

[265] David Bowie, first lines of *Sound and Vision* (*Low*, RCA, 1977).

[266] Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: the Logic of the Gaze* (Macmillan, 1983), p. 107.

with increasing verisimilitude. An immobile viewer is produced, whose corporeal, proprioceptive sense of being-in-the-world is made ever more redundant through the ascendency of the screen-fixated sense of sight and hearing, with touch being diminished into pressing-plastic-buttons or stroking the flat surface of a touch screen, whilst remaining in a constant perpendicular position in relation to the screen's surface.[267] Most profoundly, in relation to proprioception, the computer interface confuses viewpoints. It is either a desktop stacked with folders and 'windows,' which might engender experiences of looking down at text, or gazing horizontally through a window to an illusory scene.[268]

David Bohm argues that proprioception can also be experienced as a property of thought:

> If we say that thought is a reflex like any other muscular reflex – just a lot more subtle and more complex and changeable – then we ought to be able to be proprioceptive with thought. Thought should be able to perceive its own movement, be aware of its own movement. ... And then maybe we could also be attentive to the results it produces within ourselves.[269]

The functioning of the brain is often envisaged as following topolological spatial metaphors akin to information technology, yet Bohm would seem to be arguing for an awareness of movement more akin to the corporeal and symbolic experience of landscape than the instantaneity of hyperlinks between information nodes in a network. The essential difference is a central notion of self in spatio-temporal relation to the world (or mind), rather than how Richard Coyne characterises a dispersed being-in-the-screen:

> Information technology, and the spatialities it constructs – cyberspace and virtual reality – appear as the culmination of a primordial imperative. Perhaps the cultural imperative of cyberspace, with its ambiguous narratives of immersion, is technology's way of getting us back to an *in* that is not the *in* of containment, though it is a technological noncontainment.[270]

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[267] Of course, the senses of smell and taste figure in the multisensory synthesis of human perception, but touch is being mentioned in particular due to previous discussions on haptic visuality in Forest, and Merleau-Ponty's Chiasm in Mists.

[268] 'The desktop metaphor of a stack of papers, in overlapping array, implies a view from above. The window metaphor implies looking into or out of an aperture, a "perspective" position facing an upright perpendicular surface.' Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. 227. Mark Lewis's film *Algonquin Park, Early March* shows these switches of orientation.

[269] David Bohm, *Thought as a System* (Routledge, 1994), p. 125.

[270] Richard Coyne, *Technoromanticism: digital narrative, holism, and the romance of the real* (MIT Press, 1999), p. 170.

As the result of a 'primordial imperative' technological noncontainment implies a being free of geographical location or corporeal, proprioceptive experience, which includes awareness of depth perception. The screen, as agent for 'the whole interconnected technological matrix,'[271] is simply the culmination of the history of technology as a defining feature of human consciousness, in which abstract symbolic communication (language and metaphor) forms an integral part. Don Ihde, in his Phenomenology of Technics, formulates three ways in which humans interact with the world through technology:

1) Embodiment relations: where to a greater or lesser extent, a technical apparatus becomes a subliminal extension of the human subject (I): for example, a hammer, a pair of glasses, a prosthetic limb, a telephone – or even a car – which he formulates thus:

*(I-technology) → World*

2) Hermeneutic relations: where the technical equipment remains visible, requiring the conscious reading of instruments to access information about the world: for example, reading a thermometer even though we can feel how cold it is, or in the extreme, a pilot's relying on the myriad of dials in an aircraft to understand position at night:

*I → (technology-world)*

3) Alterity relations: where mediating technology forms an independent, alternative, and possibly supplanting, other to the world:

*I → technology (-world?)*

This bares all the hallmarks of science fantasy, as in The Matrix, where technology replaces the world – although, importantly, this is a world in which the individual still has a sense of self in relation to it.[272] Alterity relations are also to do with companionship – technology as fetish object, toy or even pet - as with iPhones or Tamagochi, or, on a more encompassing scale, the projection of sentient otherness onto a car or ship. As Ihde explains:

> The wish-fulfillment desire occasioned by embodiment relations – the desire for a fully transparent technology that would *be* me while at the same time giving me the powers that the use of the technology makes available – here has its counterpart fantasy, and this new fantasy has the same internal

[271] Ibid.

[272] Plato's allegory of the cave prefigures the Matrix.

contradiction: it both reduces or, here, extrapolates the technology into that which is not a technology (in the first case, the magical transformation is *into me*; in this case, *into the other*), and at the same time, it desires what is not identical with me or the other.[273]

Alterity relations to technology would seem to apply to the estranged formation of the idea of landscape, meaning that landscape as a technology has moved humans away from embodiment relations (being-in-the-world), through hermeneutic relations (cartography, scientific empiricism), to alterity relations, where the land is seen as something other – a landscape, a fantasy of belonging born of separation. More generally, Alterity relations to technology are akin to the notion of an artwork's presence, which 'insists against its time as much as it emerges, necessarily, within it.'[274] Indeed, for a communication technology to be seen as art, a magical transformation must occur, a fantasy which 'desires what is not identical with me or the other.'[275] But where is this technological line drawn if, following Helmholz, the eye is 'a marvellous apparatus,' even if he 'emphatically embeds the eye within the thickness and opacity of the body'?[276]

If authentic experience of landscape is longed for, then the innate, developmental, and culturally inflected fluidity between hypermediacy and immediacy encountered in actual landscape is emulated by idealised or functional representations on the hi-tech media screen in a baroque dance. We're offered either the immersive immediacy of hyper-real perspectival vantage points and 'virtual reality' simulations (embodiment relations), or the hypermediacy of telescopic enhancements, infra-red cameras, radar, or informational super-impositions, such as satellite navigation or Google Earth (hermeneutic relations). Authentic experience of landscape is replaced by mesmerised immersion in the screen's myriad extrusions and contortions, which offer a disembodied sense of being-in-the-world through switching between being-in-the-screen and being-on-the-screen. This presents a folding together of the immediate and hypermediate, where, for Anna Munster, 'space stretches across a series of constant deformations as the organic alters its rhythms and tempos in order to align itself with the mutable morphology of code, and as information twists itself into strange configurations that temporarily animate it.'[277] This presents a recursive *mise-en-abyme*, where subject-object relations are gradually eliminated through their intermingling, as technology seamlessly interfaces between both the self and the

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[273] Don Ihde, 'Phenomenology of technics,' *Philosophy of Technology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 527.

[274] Terry Smith, Ibid., p. 8.

[275] Don Ihde, Ibid., p. 527.

[276] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (MIT Press, 2001), p. 215.

[277] Anna Munster, *Materializing New Media* (Dartmouth College Press, 2006), pp. 63-64.

world, supplanting even a subliminal awareness of the multisensory vagaries of perception. This suggests a fourth formula for human-technology-world relations:

4) Negated relations: where technology becomes increasingly invisible, as it is taken as an extension of both the body and of the world (both embodied and hermeneutic relations), thus confusing distinctions between human and world in a negative feedback loop:

*(I-technology) → (technology-world) = (I-technology-world) → ?*

Ollivier Dyens asks how these negated relations between human, technology and world might affect humanity, using a meteorological metaphor:

> A 'human' being is now a scattered dynamic, a pollinating system, a contaminated wind. Our idea of what we are is undergoing tremendous and fundamental changes. Escaping biology's grasp, what we've always regarded as our soul is becoming a collective of signs, flesh, machines, and bodies. How will we live in a world of human-machine conscience? A world where our soul abides in machines?[278]

Munster describes 'a *becoming* carbon-silicon, matter-machine, human-computer,' where the 'finite, extensive qualities of bodies – the feeling of occupying fixed, extensive, physical space – are recombined via the introduction of a differential: the intensive, infinite forces of computational culture.'[279]

Paul Virilio bleakly summarises: 'The production of *sightless vision* is itself merely the reproduction of an intense blindness that will become the latest and last form of industrialisation: *the industrialisation of the non-gaze.*'[280]

*Landscaping*

Not witnessing the body of the medium or being aware of the functioning perceptual apparatus implies the disappearance of the medium as a concept (or mental image) that can be grasped. This presents a dispersion of subjectivity, though not one of visible disintegration but invisible, insidious integration. The art works presented in this thesis, in their various ways, are working on and inside the screen to retrieve perceptual and psychological depths associated with landscape, which are continually being flattened and homogenized, computed and simulated,

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[278] Ollivier Dyens, *Metal and Flesh: The Evolution of Man – Technology Takes Over* (MIT Press, 2001), p. 95.

[279] Anna Munster, Ibid., p. 62.

[280] Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (British Film Institute, 1994), pp.72-73.

automated and forgotten. Digital technology, the Internet, vast databases and archives supply a replacement wilderness, as the world might just lose its last remaining ones. Art can question and interrogate this increasingly fluid and smoothed out space, between optical and a merely simulated haptic visuality. This is at the frontiers and margins of human perception, in rarefied domains where screen and surface, enervation and viscerality, visible and tangible, immediacy and hypermediacy, Cartesian Perspectivalism and The Art of Describing – the various dual modes of the image – converge at baroque points of excess.[281] For example: between picturesque landscape and cartographic plane; between electronic instantaneity and artisanal timescales; between digital immateriality and physical substance; between informational superabundance and entropic noise; and between external and internal image screens – *so long as these distinctions can be made.*

'Screen as landscape' is an unstable metaphorical assertion, as landscape is not simply a two-dimensional representation, but a four-dimensional medium. Its spatial coordinates are horizontal and vertical, and a sense of depth extrapolated from perceptual experience over time. For the screen to be like landscape its illusory depths and sheer, delimited surface must be travelled, journeyed, excavated, or broken.

For Jean-Luc Nancy, the land is simply the ground upon which the 'peasant' dwells, before being estranged:

> There is some peasant in anyone who belongs and who is taken up with time-and-place, in anyone who makes his own some corner of the here-and-now: it can be a machine, a highway, or a computer as much as a field of beets or a stable. (To be sure, the peasant is, properly speaking, someone who is occupied with an immobile land, and this extension of the concept that I am proposing is only acceptable if we 'immobilize' the machine or the computer; if we make of them a sort of ground or region that one can dig into, dig up, uncover... Why wouldn't the Internet also be a kind of movable earth?).[282]

There is a ground that prefigures oppositions between the generative structures of visceral surface and the screen's illusory window: between presence and absence, integration and dislocation, proximity or distance, protection or exposure, limitation or expansion, loss or discovery. Landscape and media screen (painted, printed, projected) share a dependence on these oppositions for their existence to consciousness – a common ground held in tension. This is a region that can be inhabited, between infinite estrangement and artificial Arcadian homeland. Screen

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[281] Perhaps the most important distinction of this thesis is to bring together under one umbrella these different visual oppositions, which have been encountered separately through the research.

[282] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 55-56.

as Landscape is this ground and the artists are its peasants. They are maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between estrangement and immersion by landscaping the screen.

## Nature

> Artefacts are made, organisms grow: at first glance the distinction seems obvious enough. But behind the distinction [...] lie a series of highly problematic assumptions concerning mind and nature, interiority and exteriority, and the genesis of form.[283]

Andy Harper simulates an alternate biology across his canvases: a Darwinian process of survival, supersession and obsolescence through an expanding catalogue of physical marks. For the most part these marks are negative, as the translucent coloured slick of fluid paint across a white or coloured ground is removed, scuffed and smeared by a collection of brushes and tools of various shapes and sizes.

If graphic vignettes have their origins in books as a discrete knot of vines, then Harper releases them from these confines to the fill edges of the pictorial frame. In his paintings the rampant growth of vegetative form, cloned and hybridising as it expands, speaks of an alternate nature gone out of control, released from the stylised patterns of plant-like shapes in any number of trans-cultural designs – illuminated manuscripts, for example. Paint becomes a malevolent medium, an organic sludge acting as the matrix for artificial life, in a process of mutation and asexual reproduction, across a shallow depth of painted illusionism within an oily film of paint. But an overarching ordering principle is still discernable, if increasingly complex.

Harper's work over the last several years had its genesis in his series of 'grass' paintings, produced between 1996 and 2000. Attracted to process-led painting – setting up a simple generative system of actions, materials and rules – he produced a large body of work.[284] Each was painted with a single small size of brush, removing paint with a flick from a flat expanse of tonally graded paint, making the white primer show through. 'What I was doing with these paintings was trying to marry a pre-meditated process of making a painting with something lush and romantic...'[285] Yet the romantic here is a curious one, for it has been homogenised into the sensuous texture of a suburban lawn **[127, 128]**.

Harper confesses to a 'conceptual tidiness' with the 'single brush mark, being the unit of a painting, becoming equal to the blade of grass, the unit of the front lawn.' I say confesses, for 'conceptual tidiness' seems to find a bleak analogy in the obsessive neatness of the lawn – a gardening phenomenon strongly associated with a variety of masculine sensibility – an impoverished aesthetic born of a desire for

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[283] Tim Ingold, 'On Weaving a Basket,' *The Perception of the Environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill* (Routledge, 2000), p. 339.

[284] Process-led painting had a resurgence in the early nineties with painters such as Ian Davenport, Bernard Frize, Callum Innes and Jason Martin.

[285] Andy Harper, talking in his slide presentation at the Present Technology symposium on 16th July, 2010. His following quotations are also from this event.

127 **Andy Harper**, *Grass Painting* (2000), oil on canvas, 117 x 152 cms.

128 **Andy Harper**, *Grass Painting* (2000), detail.

129 **Cornelius Gijsbrechts**, *Trompe l'Oeil with Studio Wall and Vanitas Still Life* (1668).

130 **Boyle Family**, *World Series, Sardinia Studies and Railway Series Study.* Venice Biennale 1978.

domination over nature. But the conceptual purity of this deserves attention, for these paintings' mirroring of vegetative form with painterly gesture is a horticultural painting revolution, where the recessional, scaled-down genre of landscape is merged with the to-scale facticity of trompe l'oeil painting, e.g. Cornelius Gijsbrechts [**129**], where for Hanneke Grootenboer:

> The effect of the optical illusion in the trompe l'oeil painting offers ... a void, one in which we find ourselves ignorant of what it is precisely that deceives us. Is it a painting, which despite its hyperrealsim presents its own flatness instead of the illusion of depth? Or is the optical deception caused by our own eye, which, assuming depth, is confronted with its own annihilation?[286]

Instead of obsessive attention to detail to the textures and shadows of a variety of objects across a shallow surface, Harper's grass paintings were produced semi-automatically, working quickly and systematically across the ground of the canvas from top to bottom.[287] Because successive marks supersede ones already there, there is a suggestion of a receding space, not a perpendicular birds-eye view. However, there is still a feeling that the grass continues forever in all directions, remaining 'actual size,' an infinite plane of homogenised immanence (a suburban suppression of variation) – never reaching a horizon.

His rectangular sections of lawn are transferred from their horizontal associations with the land to the verticality of the wall. They could find associations with the landscape simulations of the Boyle Family and their extensive *World Series*, etc. [**130**]. Yet Harper was simulating both a conceptual and a cultural ideal, not a unique rectangle of the Earth's surface. As process based works, the grass paintings would seem to be commuter-belt musings on Leo Steinberg's flatbed picture plane, where he observes that:

> The flatbed picture plane makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards—any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed—whether coherently or in confusion. The pictures of the last fifteen to twenty years insist on a radically new orientation,

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[286] 'The trompe l'oeil offers us the reverse side of our visual field, of the things that we do perceive. The things 'look back' at us from a position we ourselves cannot occupy in order to see ourselves seeing.' Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: realism and illusionism in seventeenth century Dutch still-life painting* (The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 55-56.

[287] Harper actually painted his grass paintings upside down, working from bottom to top, as downward brushstrokes are easier to execute than upward ones.

in which the painted surface is no longer the analogue of a visual experience of nature but of operational processes.[288]

Steinberg's formulation applies to many artists of the post-war years, ranging from Pollock to Rauschenberg. By alluding to the surface as a literal ground through obsessively tidy, yet necessarily randomised, tiny gestural marks, the industrial analogies for the flatbed are incorporated into quasi-natural artifice; the visual experience of nature hybridised with operational processes born of automated gesture and a kind of vegetative and painterly cloning on an industrial scale. The grass paintings are genetic monocultures; actually more at home in the biotech laboratory than the manicured golfing green.

Using another suburban metaphor, after making over sixty grass paintings, Harper realised 'the project was a cul-de-sac,' and that 'me, the grass-man, was starting to stick.' So he spent several years focusing on more abstract process-led works, involving more complex geometric systems of colour, form and pattern. However, his gestural use of brushstrokes to emulate natural form crept back in by allowing them to produce more complex plant structures, for example: 'if you've got seven blades of grass going in one direction next to seven going in the other direction you've got a palm frond.' Along with allowing composite forms to emerge (painterly equivalents to complex organisms), there came a massive expansion of his shapes and sizes of tool: 'fingers, compressed air, rubber kidneys used for ceramics, strange tools that I might cut with a Stanley knife such as window scrapers and so on.'

It could be speculated that Harper's gestural expansion from 'unicellular' grass to 'multi-cellular' ecosystem echoes Darwinian evolution: a continuous genetic hybridisation, reaching complexities approaching life – in a sense, trying to catch up with the present day. Yet this reading of the works as somehow representative of primordial jungle is modified by the knowledge that these simulated life forms have evolved in a matter of days, and continue to mutate and cross-fertilise in subsequent paintings [**131-137**]. Rather than natural processes, technologies of bioengineering and computer simulation seem more appropriate analogies. Weird symmetries multiply across the surfaces, sometimes crystallised into mirrored paintings [**138**]. Symmetry in art implies an underlying order to things, and can be viewed from several perspectives: the religious or spiritual, the scientific and rational, the uncanny symbolism of the mirror image, or the purely decorative. All of these seem to be in play, as the painted screen becomes a monstrous Petri dish, where the growth of quasi-organic life might only be arrested due to using up all the available nutrients. Appropriately, many titles are inspired by J.G. Ballard novels, and Harper's at once super-abundant and dystopian painterly vision (or

[288] Leo Steinberg, from a lecture Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1968; First published in 'Reflections on the State of Criticism', in *Artforum* in March 1972; in *Other Criteria*, 1972, pp.61-98.

**131** **Andy Harper**, *Feast of Skulls* (2008), oil on canvas, 198 x 305 cms.

**132** **Andy Harper**, *Feast of Skulls* (2008), detail.

**133** **Andy Harper**, *Dry Tide* (2008), oil on canvas, 190 x 250 cms.

**134** **Andy Harper**, *Dry Tide* (2008), detail.

135 **Andy Harper**, *Silent Generation* (2008), oil on canvas, 95 x 120 cms.

136 **Andy Harper**, *Feast* (2008), oil on canvas, 140 x 110 cms.

137 **Andy Harper**, *Dizzy Pain* (2008), oil on canvas, 95 x 120 cms.

138 **Andy Harper**, *Half Devil, Half Buccaneer* (2008), oil on canvas, 65 x 80 cms.

obscuring of vision) speaks of an alternate history of painting as a hermetically sealed medium – not in the modernist formalist sense but as a festering biotech experiment gone seriously wrong through the alchemy of paint.

Oil paint is base matter, the *prima materia,* akin to many substances in its pure state: coloured mud and oil, organic sludge, skin and body fluids at the same time as liquid light and coloured film. In these animal, vegetable and mineral forms paint re-materialises the doubtful visual evidence of the physical world. Simulacra are made flesh. If life originated in a 'primordial soup' of amino acids and minerals, then oil paint, with its combination of organic and mineral pigments, would seem a perfect material analogy.

In Harper's work, rather than populating the illusion of a three-dimensional world, fluid paint is confined to a shallow pool across a surface – a shallow film of transparent paint – a substrate in which motion is captured (cellular celluloid). Yet three-dimensionality seems a latent possibility. The painted screen image is intransigent though: the more paint that's removed, by the fast working, automated hand, the denser the woven thicket of information becomes. It's a kind of suffocation of pictorial depth as vegetation competes for the last gasps of air: an oily, vegetal *horror vacui* – a fear of empty spaces where baroque ornamentation has turned feral.

Harper links his finite catalogue of evolving marks and forms as akin to graphic clip art.[289] And in a broader sense, classifying information into sets and subsets is how binary information is digitally configured and navigated, both across the human-computer interface, and within the computer's electronic architecture. His variety of forms is vanishingly small compared to life and the processing power of computers (as witnessed in whatever the latest CGI spectacular happens to be). Yet a more primitive link to the digital can be made to its etymological origin with fingers, and what the hand with fingers can do: interwoven improvisations and painterly special effects; repetitions and accidental mutations, as he becomes ever more lost in a virtual wilderness, in a soup of possibilities.

The development of Harper's inventory of gestures would seem to mirror the immanent processes of evolutionary phylogenesis, as Tim Ingold suggests:

> [T]he templates, measures and rules of thumb of the artisan or craftsman no more add up to a design for the artefacts he produces than do genes constitute a blueprint for the organism. Like genes, they set the parameters of the process but do not prefigure the form.[290]

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[289] Clip art is any ready-made miniature illustration used by designers or the general public, ranging between trees and street furniture used in architectural illustrations, to smiley-faced 'emoticons' used in mobile texting.

[290] Tim Ingold, Ibid., p. 345

Importantly, Harper is resistant to classifying his marks – naming them, or developing some kind of genealogy. His alter-nature retains a large degree of autonomy, to which he is enthralled – marooned in a primordial or alien world of his own making.

> 'The brief span of an individual life is misleading. Each of us is as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our bloodstreams are tributaries of the great sea of its total memory.'[291]

Just as Harper's human (or animal) actions began by resembling plant forms, these structures have responded by starting to resemble insect or animal parts. There is a confusion of biological kingdoms – the sense of a supra-intelligent agency lurking somewhere in the jungly weave of stems, leaves, flowers, pods, seeds, berries, tendrils, rhizomes, organs and segmented bodies. There is animism within the animated film of paint. In some paintings skeletal shapes appear, and rectilinear forms redolent of engineering and hi-tech. It's possible to extrapolate the thickets as networks and nodes in an organic computer; a cyborg assemblage of virus, bacteria, fungus, plant, insect, animal, human and machine; all of life and technology forced through a sieve; DNA breeding with metal, plastic, silicon, and the binary structures of information. Is some kind of gothic or uncanny sensibility being brought to the light, born of a fear of all-powerful, incomprehensible technology – a common theme for science fiction and horror?

The Sea of Solaris strongly figures in the conceptualisation of the project. Even though his phantom forms of artificial or alien life are entirely products of the mind and hand, they have a self-determinacy, 'held within a physical memory of action,'[292] rather than a preconception. As Ingold suggests: 'Mind is not above, nor nature below; rather, if we ask where mind is, it is in the weave of the surface itself.'[293]

> The 'tree-mountains', 'extensors', 'fungoids', 'mimoids', 'symmetriads' and 'asymmetriads', 'vertibrids' and 'agilus' are artificial, linguistically awkward terms, but they do give some impression of Solaris to anyone who has only seen the planet in blurred photographs and incomplete films.[294]

If life is about negative entropy – preserving form through the code of DNA – then Harper's alter-nature opposes another historically entropic process, the supposed extinction of modernist painting in minimal abstraction. This is not

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[291] Bodkin talking to Kerans in J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (Harper Collins, 1962), p. 44.

[292] Ibid., p. 348.

[293] Ibid., p. 348.

[294] Stanislav Lem, *Solaris* (1961), trans. Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox (Faber and Faber, 1970/2003), p. 116.

through post-modern parody, pluralism and play, or retro-modernist nostalgia, but through a kind of post-human becoming-human – a quasi-uterine reconstruction of nature and painting as proto-landscape, through chromosomic fragments, curlicues, arabesques, and filaments of gestural mark. His paintings are both trompe l'oeils and landscapes, both real-scale sculptural weaves of paint/life, and representations. Their fecund mutations completely colonise the flat surface like a physical landscape, yet the structures are striving for three-dimensionality through layering and rounded foreshortening. Their spatial ancestor is analytic Cubism, with paint as the compost for composition, a biotech Vorticism born of a synthetic double helix. They are spaces without shadow: a nocturnal world where light seems a product of bioluminescence, more akin to the phosphorescent video screen than the painted one:

> A blurred region, in the heart of vastness, far from earth and heaven, with no ground underfoot, no vault of sky overhead, nothing. I am the prisoner of an alien matter and my body is clothed in dead, formless substance – or rather I have no body, I *am* that alien matter. Nebulous pink globules surround me, suspended in a medium more opaque than air, for objects only become clear at very close range, although when they do approach they are abnormally distinct, and their presence comes home to me with a preternatural vividness. The conviction of its substantial, tangible reality is now so overwhelming that later, when I wake up, I have the impression that I have just left a state of true perception, and everything I see after opening my eyes seems hazy and unreal.[295]

[295] Stanislav Lem, *Solaris* (1961), trans. Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox (Faber and Faber, 1970/2003), p. 187.

139 Detail of a map of the Burren, County Clare, Ireland.
Tim Robbins (Folding Landscapes, 1999).

## Strange Field[296]

> 'Nature,' as it is most often understood, is an abstraction, as is the idea of man standing before it. What is real is the earth, the sea, the sky, the sand, one's feet on the ground, and one's breath, the smell of grass and coal, the crackling of electricity, the swarming of pixels...[297]

An encounter with Tim Head's large-scale digital projection, *Treacherous Light* (2000) [**140**], calls into question the distance from which the screen should be viewed – and what the digital screen actually is.

From afar a wall is lit by a large shimmering rectangle.[298] At first glance, it perhaps looks like noise or 'snow' on an analogue TV. Yet there is a strange constancy to the projected screen's agitation – a perceptible organising principle to the fluctuation of colour, barely distinguishable from an overall silvery scintillation.

At close range, within a couple of meters, the screen materialises into its latticed matrix. Its constituent pixels have an ever-changing randomised brightness and hue, ranging the gamut of the screen's capabilities. It soon becomes clear that these individual units are choreographed: to vertically move, pixel-by-pixel from the top of the screen to the bottom, or in alternate columns, from bottom to top. This is replicated on the horizontal axis, so that four moving fields of pixels perform a regimented dance between each other's paths [**141**]. For perception, this motion falls somewhere between being fluid or stepped, by which the eye is drawn to wandering across the surface, following an individual coloured pixel's constant, trickling progress as it makes its way across, before attention might intentionally or involuntarily meander to another pixel moving in a different direction.

But it is in the space between far and near that *Treacherous Light* lives up to its title. The shifting pixel groupings of random tone and colour form fleeting screen artefacts, larger than the constituting pixels, which dissolve and mutate into other proto-objects just as soon as perception has registered their existence. Following a simple pictorial rule, where pixels entering the field of the screen on the four sides are given a randomised colour, a living surface of commingled manifestations and disintegrations of quasi-organic forms effervesces, drifting free from the horizontal and vertical axes of pixellated movements. An optimal viewpoint might be poised between tracking processions of pixels and an overall picture of smoke-like apparitions within a rectangular frame. But *Treacherous Light* resists any possibility of static positioning – both physically and mentally.

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[296] Whilst walking the Burren in Ireland in 1999, my beloved and I were diverted from the footpath to visit what turned out to be (as far as we could make out) a pretty non-descript area of land named on the map as 'a strange field' [**139**].

[297] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 56.

[298] Perhaps 360 x 480 cm, depending on the scale of the space.

**140** **Tim Head**, *Treacherous Light* (2000) (installation view and details), digitally projected real-time computer program.

**141** Six-colour illustration of the pixel choreography in *Treacherous Light*.

Although *Treacherous Light* incessantly changes, the visual cortex strives for object or pattern recognition. This mental activity is, perhaps surprisingly, not a tiring experience, as proto-objects within the digital matrix are happily seized upon and relinquished as new ones materialise. These emergent forms are redolent of shallow watery or vaporous depths of sub-atomic, molecular, or cellular structures. Rendered at the immersive scale of the environmental or meteorological, their structures radically change with even slight movements of the eyes towards, around, and away from the screen. The fluidity of their appearances and disappearances engenders a state of reverie, not of information overload.[299] For recognition of form is at a proto-symbolic, molecular, or proterozoic stage; a semiotic, compositional, or phylogenetic regression to latent forms of object-like emergence – an atomised primordial soup of potentialities, continually replenished by new ones.

From the outset it is perceptibly clear that this is not a playback of a DVD, for *Treacherous Light* presents the actuality of the computer's hardware running at full tilt. The impression of noise is generated by the purity of a simple grid-based rule – not a geometric algorithm.[300] This is an important distinction to make between Head's work and numerous artists working in digital media, going back to the 1960s, for example James Whitney's astonishing film *Lapis* (1963-1966) [**142**], to the mesmeric products of vector graphics and fractal geometry – the building blocks of life-like simulations in CGI. As Laura Marks notes in her study of the relationships between Islamic design and new media art: 'Computer media too often obfuscate, rather than explicate, the relationship between the perceptible image and the underlying algorithm.'[301] This 'neobaroque,' as Sean Cubitt dubs it, manifests in cinematic narratives as well as visuals, but most pertinently, with regard to Head's work, algorithms are ubiquitous to the presentation of data on the user interface or screen, from image compression to anti-aliasing text. 'By now, digital technology has become so ubiquitous and easy to use that it is well-nigh impossible to lift away the interface.'[302] Saying this, Marks presents many examples of new media artists working to deconstruct the interface, such as Joan Heemskerk's and Dirk Paesmans's *JODI* (1995) [**143**], in which 'complex

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[299] Information overload was an effect of the flicker films of Paul Sharits, for example *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* (1969), or Head's extreme digital monitor work, *Laughing Cavalier* (2002) – which is perhaps the most powerful generator of maximised 'micro-awarenesses' (see below), as the flat colour of the screen is randomly changed at the frequency of the monitor – perhaps 120 times a second. In the truest sense *Laughing Cavalier* is ineffable, offering a hyper-subjective experience that defies any description or explanation.

[300] The generation of random colour, from a combination of the 256 levels of the red, green and blue colour channels, does involve a complex pseudo-randomising algorithm, but the concept of randomness that it simulates is a simple one to grasp - although it is impossible for human vision to distinguish the gradations between 16,777,216 colours.

[301] Laura U. Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: an Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (MIT Press, 2010), p. 174.

[302] Laura U. Marks, Ibid., p. 216.

**142** **James Whitney**, *Lapis* (1963-1966), film animation.

**143** Screen shot of *JODI* (1995), Joan Heemskerk, Dirk Paesmans.

**144** **Frieder Nake**, *Walk-through-Raster* (1966), computer drawing.

programming renders opaque the (supposed) transparency of standard graphical user interfaces.'[303] Making binary encoded data visible across the screen's two-dimensional matrix has its origins in groundbreaking artworks, such as Frieder Nake's *Walk-through-Raster* (1966) [**144**]. Yet the object of these works is to generate opaque complexity out of visualising code, in the end similar to the complexity of algorithmic works: complex geometric structures akin to Islamic design or idealised natural form; or realist transparency out of fractals and simulated perspectival space. As Marks suggests, all these works have utopian, transcendentalist intentions: 'artists were recognizing that the perceptible image was an interface to information – which in turn was an interface to some sort of infinite.'[304]

In all of Head's data-projection works since *Terminal Light* (2000) the intention has not been to visualise the infinite depths and complexity of code within the computer's software, memory caches or the Internet. Neither has it been to use the mathematical processing power of the computer to augment and animate elaborate geometric algorithms. Instead, Head worked from the simple premise of asking the question: 'what is the digital medium?'[305] And by this he simply means: what is the processing speed of the computer, and what are the limits of the screen's capabilities? In this respect his projection works connect to the conceptualism of Sol Le Witt, for example *Wall Drawing #414* (1984) [**145**] – yet updated for the untiring and almost infinitely more speedy replacement of the gallery technician: the computer and data projector, capable of millions of grid-based permutations every second.[306] Through this 'light of speed,'[307] the most essential question (yet also the most difficult to determine) is: what are the subliminal affects on human perceptual experience?

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[303] Laura U. Marks, Ibid., p. 210. http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org/

[304] Laura U. Marks, Ibid., p. 216.

[305] I interviewed Tim Head on 15th March 2012 at his studio, and took notes. He showed me some earlier screen-based works, *Happy Days* (1998-99), and *A Hard Day's Night* (2000) – which comprised five works that incorporated randomised colour superimpositions in larger blocks, columns or segments, reminiscent of the abstract colour experiments of Itten or Albers – yet animated so as to produce 'amazing colour combinations that you wouldn't choose.'

[306] Head's real-time computer programs can work on any computer, and any screen resolution or ratio. Their incrementally progressive complexity has been in response to faster computer clock speeds, tempered by increasing screen resolutions.

[307] '... we are helpless witnesses to the vehicular dissipation, to the implosion of all mass and of all matter in the ubiquity of the excess of the light of speed. Thus at the heart of this *critical mass* that has attained the point of no return, where temporal duration and spatial extension will have been evacuated by the final reconcentration of the physical field, *all surfaces will be face to face, overexposed in a single interface*, the absolute triumph of the geocentric illusion where the Occident will have finally come to its complete expression.' Paull Virilio (1984), 'The Light of Speed,' *Negative Horizon* (Continuum, 2005), p. 118.

**145** **Sol Le Witt**, *Wall Drawing #414* (1984).

**146** **Malcolm Le Grice**, *Travelling with Mark* (2003), three-screen projection.

In Head's projection works there is no obfuscation, either through algorithms or code. It is evident (or at least easily explicable) what is happening on screen and what the computer's modest code is programmed to do. It presents an extreme aniconism, as Marks describes: 'Restrained, mysterious, and mystical, aniconism privileges the infinite ... by impeding access to it through the image. The image is suppressed; information indicates the infinite just modestly; the infinite, remaining relatively enfolded, retains its power.'[308]

For Marks, the digital medium works against a sense of corporeality: 'The transcendental discourse around digital media is based on the desire for immortality that comes only at the expense of severing ties with the material world ... The abstraction of communication into information is an attempt to hold mortality at bay, but it takes place at the expense of our own dematerialization.'[309] Lyotard questions the 'telepresence' of information technology by asking: 'What is a place, a moment, not anchored in the immediate 'passion' of what happens. Is a computer in any way here and now? Can anything *happen* with it? Can anything happen *to* it?'[310]

Head's materialist approach manifestly doesn't exclude the possibility of corporeal experiences. This is on the level of variable and indeterminate body-screen distance, but also on the cortical level, where digital abstraction and perceptual comprehension collide or coalesce. In an artist's statement, Head vividly makes the case for a materialist approach to the digital medium, investigating humanity's experiential relation to it:

> The fundamental condition of the digital screen is instability, each pixel being continually redrawn many times a second. Bathed in the screen's insubstantial glow we absorb this continuous agitation daily. Concealed beneath the screen, the computer's internal workings operate at speeds that are beyond the range of our senses, engendering a giddy sense of acceleration in its wake. Yet behind the feverish surface of the computer's chilled deliveries is an underlying emptiness, a sense of something not wholly satisfied. The pulse of our heartbeat and the digital pulse tick inextricably out of sync with each other.[311]

The beating of the heart is felt bodily, fluctuating in tempo due to physical exertion or psychological excitements. The brain is another matter though. It has an imperceptible clock-speed, for which Head's real-time computer programs actually seem to offer the chance for familiarisation. This is due to the extremely

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[308] Laura U. Marks, http://enfoldment.net/7-2/

[309] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: sensuous theory and multisensual media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 178.

[310] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux,' *Thinking about Exhibitions,* ed. R. Greenberg, B.W. Ferguson & S. Nairne (Routledge, 1996), p. 118.

[311] *The Digital Dimension,* Artist's Statement, Tim Head, November 2011. http://www.ucl. ac.uk/slade/timhead/texts/th_digitaldimension.htm

partial and subjective picturing that perception can latch onto within the bewildering superabundance of optical stimulation. For what in the non-screened (real) world is actually viewable: a whirling flock of starlings at dusk; the scintillation of sunlight on the sea; a blizzard of snow; or just the iridescent light reflected off objects on a table? The world runs at an infinite refresh rate, and Head's screen-based works, through their relative slowness, somehow reveal to perception its sluggish response to visual stimuli. As Brian Massumi notes, 'there is a half-second delay between the onset of brain activity and conscious awareness of the event.'[312] This means that between retinal activity and perception a myriad of differing optical stimuli must smudge or merge into each other in the intervening time: 'an infinite cloud of infinitesimal monadic awarenesses: micro-awarenesses without actual awareness, gnats of potential experience.'[313]

*Treacherous Light*, and, in their own unique ways, sister works such as *Scent* (2009) and *Sweet Bird* (2010),[314] manifest perceptible, slowed-down, finite versions of the 'habitually unperceived,' chaotically infinite contaminants of vision (of which Helmholtz empirically studied).[315] Earlier in his book, Parables for the Virtual, Massumi discusses the so-called *Ganzfeld* experiments into the 'total field' of perception, where participants' eyes were made to see pure white light, excluding the subliminal presence of the nose in the field of vision.[316] Instead of a constant field of whiteness, the participants had a vast range of experiences between something and nothingness, movement forwards through fog or disembodied flight – often total disorientation, both spatially and temporally. As Massumi continues: 'Vision at its most simple and concrete – white light on retina – is a complex presentation of its own abstraction. ... What began as a procedure of reduction and recombination of a field of experience ended as an exercise in its disappearance through *empirical self-abstraction.*'[317]

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[312] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 195. This was verified by the work of Benjamin Libet in the 1970s, explaining the phenomenon of perceiving the second hand of a clock seemingly pause for more than a second when first looked at.

[313] Brian Massumi, Ibid., p. 196.

[314] To show screen-shots of Head's work is pointless. *Terminal Light, Treacherous Light, Scent* and *Sweet Bird* only 'substantially' differ in their particular choreographies and speeds. It is important to note that these attributes are not fixed to a specific screen ratio, resolution, or computer clock speed.

[315] '[C]ontinual variations in angle, illumination, and color, endogenous retinal firings, nystagmus, more or less 'voluntary' eye movements, all manner of body movements and transports, to which might be added lapses and concentrations of attention.' Brian Massumi, Ibid., p. 155.

[316] Using something like Ping-Pong balls cut in half over each eye.

[317] Brian Massumi, Ibid., pp. 146-147.

For the neurologist Semir Zeki 'the only reality is brain reality.'[318] And for Jean Baudrillard the 'very definition of the real is *that of which it is possible to provide an equivalent reproduction.*'[319] Head's projections provide an equivalent visual reproduction of brain reality, which at its basic level, as a blank screen, self-abstracts. The abstraction is empirically generated within the fixed confines of the screen's matrix and the computer's clock – a digitised alter-abstraction, which is comprehensible in its perceived structural simplicity close up. It would seem that perception when confronted by a regimented and exaggerated replication of its own self-abstraction, is made viscerally aware of the formation processes of a 'relational continuum,'[320] between the chaotic multiplicity of visual aberrations and the fleeting self-configuration of object-like form and depth-like space – satisfying a 'yearning for a presence that can never be fulfilled.'[321] For Anna Munster, experience of cyberspace is 'prefigured in the baroque relations articulated between the organic world, natural science and aesthetics.'[322]

> It is constituted across the folded interval that extends and opens up as the times of organic matter come into a relation with the speeds of information. Its space stretches across a series of constant deformations as the organic alters its rhythms and tempos in order to align itself with the mutable morphology of code, and as information twists itself into strange configurations that temporarily animate it. The temporality of digital embodiment comprises not simply moving toward absolute speed but also a stretch of asynchronicity punctured by lags or intervals. These delays occur because both code and the body fall short of the other's speeds.[323]

*Treacherous Light* starkly verifies the asynchronicity of the speeds of brain and computer, revealing the extreme differential between a raw digital screen animation formula, and the automatic and memory-formed object-recognition complexity of the visual cortex. 'Objects are anesthetic specifications of the growth pain of perception's passing into and out of itself,'[324] according to Massumi. In *Treacherous Light* these objects form on an internal image-screen, as a plethora of pixellated, digitally slowed down and magnified 'micro-awarenesses ... simultaneous and

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[318] Semir Zeki, *Splendours and Miseries of the Brain* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 89.

[319] Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), trans. Ian Hamilton Grant (SAGE, 1993), p. 73.

[320] Brian Massumi, Ibid., p. 197.

[321] Martin Jay discussing baroque sensibility, *Scopic Regimes of Modernity. Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Dia Art Foundation, 1988), p. 18.

[322] Anna Munster, *Materializing New Media* (Dartmouth College Press, 2006), p. 64.

[323] Anna Munster, Ibid., p. 64.

[324] Brian Massumi, Ibid., p. 160.

bifurcating paths of perception's passing.'[325] Although usually invisible to perception, *Treacherous Light* makes these emergent, generative stimuli manifest, alongside a bewildered perceptual apparatus, continually playing catch-up: 'The difference at the heart of perception is an ontological one between genesis (of the world, ever-renewed) and functioning (in the world, always again): worlding and recognition, in a mutually sustaining rhythm.'[326] *Treacherous Light* presents this frontier, an interfacial inter-zone, between object manifestation and disintegration, between immanent depth formation and sheer planarity.

*Sweet Bird* (2010) configures a very different *screen as landscape* – or maximised use of the screen's 'real estate.' Although similar to *Treacherous Light* in its simple formulation, instead of alternate pixels being assigned random colour values as they enter the screen along the four sides, every pixel is randomised. As these fields shoot across the screen, horizontally and vertically, the four colour values at any one location are averaged, meaning that the actual colour is never seen, but only surmised by following its interactive path.[327]

The four overlaid fields of colour generate an illusion of depth unlike anything observable in the outside world. Perception finds it impossible to stay fixed in one location for long, as it is continually being drawn into the speedy progress of one or other of the moving fields, which seems to flow under the resultant noise of the other three fields – it being virtually impossible to track movement in more than one direction at the same time. To observe the object-like formations is more a matter of will compared to *Treacherous Light* – a matter of de-centring attention. They materialise fleetingly as the eyes move to another location on the screen. Rather than vaporous apparitions, they materialise and evaporate far more quickly, as three-dimensional flurries or waves of particles. Ian Hunt observes:

> The analogies you find for these movements may derive from organic or crystalline forms, or from your understanding of physics of the largest or smallest scale, but that will only ever be analogies. Once again you encounter something that is like nature, that seems to mimic nature, but is not of it.[328]

'Once again'? In his essay, Hunt is referring to another work by Head – but asking this question could inform thinking around the persistence of natural form or landscape in the most extreme natural, meteorological or technological circumstances. A point of confluence might be found with a work by Malcolm Le

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[325] 'If the empirical is the anesthetic, then the pain accompanying perception's passing forcefully into itself and continuing superempirically in flight from its objective quelling – what can this be but *aesthetic?* Brian Massumi, Ibid., p. 160

[326] Brian Massumi, Ibid., p. 152.

[327] This is impossible to represent in a diagram, as in each 'step' a particular pixel changes colour entirely when combined with pixels coming from three different directions.

[328] Ian Hunt, 'Inside the Head of the Machine,' *Tim Head: Raw Material* (Huddersfield Art Gallery, 2009), p. 32.

Grice titled *Travelling with Mark* (2003) [**146**], where digital footage of a landscape speeding by the window of a train is put through various algorithmic processes of image compression and colour accentuation. Vehicular and computational speeds perceptually coalesce around emergences and dissolutions of forms that remain insistently 'natural' in their effect. The abstract, virtual and estranged notion of landscape depends on metaphors and analogies in its very formation – as something, 'once again,' *that is like*, rather than something new, *that just is.*

By pushing estrangement to a perceptual limit point, Head's projection works offer a direct (not representational) encounter with the sublime – making present the supposedly unpresentable – the cortical and mindful workings of presentation itself. Jean-François Lyotard speculates on two forms of inhuman. 'The inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development (among others) must not be confused with the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage.'[329] Taking Guillaume Apollinaire's 1913 avant-gardist maxim, 'More than anything, artists are men who want to become inhuman,' he connects the notion of the sublime to a subconscious mental state: 'in the sublime, nature stops addressing itself to us in this language of forms, in these visual or sound 'landscapes' which bring about pure pleasure of the beautiful and inspire commentary as an attempt at decipherment.'[330] For Lyotard, the sublime 'was both hidden and shown up by the aesthetics of Romanticism,'[331] a second order representational sublime, latent with the complete separation of matter and form implied by Kant's aesthetics. Lyotard proposes that art must attend to pure 'presence,' the 'nuance and timbre' of matter – subliminal to 'the regime of receptivity or intelligence.'[332] Head's projection works paradoxically show the continual perceptual emergence of mental ghosts of the nuance and timbre of matter, and the immanence of spatial, meteorological and landscape metaphors, out of alien digital form.

> There is always an excess of the analog over the digital, because it perceptually fringes, synesthetically dopplers, umbilically backgrounds, and insensibly recedes to a virtual center immanent at every point along the path – all in the same contortionist motion. It is most twisted. The analog and the digital must be thought together, asymmetrically. Because the analog is always a fold ahead.[333]

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[329] Ibid., p.2.

[330] Ibid, p.137.

[331] Ibid, p.139.

[332] Ibid., p. 140.

[333] Brian Massumi, Ibid., p. 143.

## Pastoral Idyll

*Paper Landscape* is a Super 8 film-performance by Guy Sherwin, made in 1975 and occasionally performed since. The set-up consists of a Super 8 film projector on a stand aimed at a freestanding wooden frame stretched with semi-transparent polythene [**147**]. The performance commences with the artist switching on the projector, and then walking behind the screen with a pot of white paint and a brush.

At first the projection is simply white light (meaning the film is clear celluloid), as the film frame exactly fits the translucent screen through which Sherwin can fuzzily be seen. Slowly, he starts to paint the back of the screen white from the bottom edge, and it soon becomes clear that something is also happening within the projected film [**148-150**]. Hands are tearing off bits of paper, roughly corresponding to the sweeps of the white brush. Over the space of around three minutes the legs of a figure are revealed, surrounded by grass, just as our view of Sherwin behind the screen is beginning to be obscured by paint. At this point the filmed figure briefly exits the frame to the left, then returns to continue with the tearing, whilst Sherwin waits to recommence his painting.

As the action continues upwards, it becomes evident that the new figure is the filmed Sherwin, tearing away at a paper screen from behind, located in a landscape setting. For a while these two figures, both facing the audience, merge and intertwine (and interact) through the broken sweeps of paint and the patchy ripping of the paper. They continue to the top of their respective, contiguous screens – the plastic one, framed by the projector's beam, and the paper one contained by the framing of the Super 8 camera.

After the illusory paper tearing and the actual painting are completed at the top of the frame, at around six minutes into the performance, the performing Sherwin is entirely obscured. The filmed Sherwin exits the frame to the right, leaving us for a few moments with the landscape scene – an English pastoral idyll, with a meadow and verdant hills beyond. Then the filmed Sherwin re-enters, and steps over the illusory frame to the audience's side, turning to admire the view.

To my mind, when I first saw Paper Landscape, this seemed like the perfect ending, as the illusory figure has magically broken through the palpably physical surface of the image-screen, a barrier that the real Sherwin remains trapped behind. It makes a picture reminiscent of Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Mist.*

But then the filmed figure steps back over frame into the meadow, and starts walking, and then running, across the field towards the wooded hillside in the distance, disappearing into the landscape, and the low-resolution film grain of Super 8.

As our eyes are trained on this spot, trying to discern a figure, something inexplicable happens. The landscape seems to rupture at this vanishing point. The blade of a knife first punctures then slices the plastic screen, first to the right, then

PAPER LANDSCAPE 1975 Silent;10 mins.
Performance using super 8 film, polythene screen, white paint and performer.

147 **Guy Sherwin**, *Paper Landscape* (1975), diagram and description of the film performance.

148 **Guy Sherwin**, *Paper Landscape* (1975-now), Super 8 film performance.

149 **Guy Sherwin**, *Paper Landscape* (1975-now), Super 8 film performance.

**150** **Guy Sherwin**, *Paper Landscape* (1975-now), Super 8 film performance.

from the left, briefly making a triangle of grass to the filmed Sherwin's vanishing point, forming converging lines of perspective. After the horizontal cut is completed, the wet painted plastic droops and flops away, revealing the present-day artist behind the actual frame, with the remaining strip of painted plastic still showing the hills and sky at the top. Sherwin then steps over the real frame, back to our side of the screen. As he walks towards the projector the rectangle of the projected landscape grows ever smaller on his torso until he reaches the projector and turns it off.

Through the shared magic of painted and filmic illusion, *Paper Landscape* offers a peculiar coexistence of materials – the filmed paper and the painted plastic screens. Present gestural time, as the back of the polythene is covered with white paint, and the past, filmed time coalesce in this fleeting apparition. The perceptual confusions of this are a delightful challenge for the viewer, and I felt some disappointment that the real Sherwin had to continue painting the screen upwards, obliterating himself from view, although it was intriguing to see the 1975 Sherwin properly, with long hair and red jacket.

For Sherwin, as a structural filmmaker, these nostalgic musings are, no doubt, anathema – and even more irrelevant to a performance closer to the time of filming, which would exclude any interest in the vagaries of fashion. Yet Sherwin's dance between present and past selves, however proximate in time, still conjures thoughts about recapturing, or remembering a lost time; a naivety of which Friedrich Schiller elaborates: 'Our childhood is the only unmutilated piece of nature which we can still find in civilised humanity and therefore it is no wonder if every footprint of nature outside ourselves leads us back to our childhood.'[334] *Paper Landscape*, with the childlike playfulness of its staging, offers the audience the imagined possibility of an encounter with one's own childhood self, followed by an imagined re-absorption into nature. This is why the moment when the screen is slashed is so shocking. The supposed pictorial vanishing point, where the filmed protagonist disappears into the view as he runs away, is superseded by a temporal vanishing point (a death), as the screen is violated at the very point where our innocent imaginative projection into deep space is located. Pastoral calm is broken by a terrifying realisation of the impossibility of a return to nature, or the lost garden of childhood.

Sherwin's film was produced in 1975, the same year as the film version of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest was released [**151**]. A narrative link can be made to the final scene where the Native American psychiatric patient, Chief, after finding McMurphy lobotomised, breaks out of the mental institution and disappears into the dawn landscape. He is taking his friend 'with' him, after his 'release' through suffocation at Chief's own hands. In *Paper Landscape* the audience is McMurphy,

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[334] Friedrich Schiller, 'On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry' (1795-96), *On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature*, trans. Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Carcanet Press, 1981), p. 33.

**151** Closing scenes from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), directed by Milos Forman. Based on the novel by Ken Kesey.

**152** **Nicolas Poussin**, *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (1648).

liberated after his 'treatment.' Sherwin takes us imaginatively with him, only to shatter our collective fantasy of escape into nature with the destruction of the screen. Yet through this he offers a new dream of escaping the imprisonment of the screen image.[335]

Hal Foster, citing Jacques Lacan, asserts that the internal image-screen 'allows the subject, at the point of the picture, to behold the object, at the point of light, otherwise it would be impossible, for to see without this screen would be to be blinded by the gaze or touched by the real.'[336] Sherwin offers a situation that ruptures the protective barrier, our constructed defences – our 'paper landscape' – just as Chief's defences were broken by the sight of death in his friend's absent eyes.

It would seem that this has not so much to do with the simple, yet mesmerising trickery of the penultimate stage of the performance – the knife slicing the image – but the protracted set-up: a delightful confusion of spatio-temporal and psychological registers, accentuated by the patchy imperfections of the painted surface and the noisy presence of film grain – technological weather. The audience feels the material and elemental fragility of the illusion, and has perceptually shared in the labours of the two Sherwins in suspending disbelief.

Back in the mists of time, Sherwin dreamt up *Paper Landscape* as a projection into the future. It is a performance of two mutually dependent, and momentarily reconciled halves: the present-past filmed Sherwin, and the present-future performing Sherwin, as they paint and tear themselves out of and into existence. *Paper Landscape* exists in the past and the future: the filmed Sherwin configures future-Sherwins. This procession of present future-Sherwins ritually erases themselves in order to fleetingly reconnect with a lost past-Sherwin who could magically project himself into the future – and the past. As Anne Friedberg explains, 'the time of filming was shifted onto the time of the film's projection, the cinematic apparatus enacted a tesseract as a time machine of inherent delay and feedback. The moving image opened the representational frame to the temporal analog of near and far – the now and then.'[337] *Paper Landscape* is a two-way time and space machine, projecting into the past, present, and the future – the screen, the performance space, and the illusory beyond. Its ultimate poignancy is that it is dependent on Sherwin's continuing existence. Without him his filmed self will eternally join him, disappearing into the landscape.

T.J. Clarke, in discussing Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (1648) **[152]**, reaches a conclusion about the painting's intentions that seems pertinent to *Paper Landscape*. The running man has his head turned, his gaze

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[335] On questioning about the link with One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Sherwin responded by email: 'I did see One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest though I don't remember the ending or when I saw it. But there was another film that had that same narrative release that you describe: A Young Man Condemned to Death Escapes by Bresson.'

[336] Hal Foster, *Return of the Real*, MIT Press, 1996, p.140.

[337] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window* (MIT Press, 2006), p. 93. (A tesseract is a four-dimensional projection of a cube. It is to the cube what the cube is to the square).

fixed on the horrific sight of a lifeless figure in the foreground of the picture, held in the coils of a huge snake. 'Everything in a [any] picture is haunted by 'the auratic power of death.' Picturing is striking a balance between using that power and making it palatable – conjuring it away.'[338] In *Paper Landscape* the running man doesn't look round, he is not frozen in a still image. Yet the future-Sherwin, trapped behind the screen (along with the stilled audience in front) has been transfixed by the action – in a sense an eternal moment akin to Poussin's running man. Yet they have not been repulsed/enthralled by a figurative sight of death, but a filmed one – of a lost past (a lost figure) made fleetingly eternal. As Clarke notes: 'What is it the running (and not running) man recoils (but does not recoil) from? Not from death pure and simple, I would say, and not just from the snake's endless, formless liveliness, but from an obscene mixture of the two – from the way one state feeds on the other.'[339] The 'obscene mixture' in *Paper Landscape* is born of the audience's willingness to suspend disbelief, mistaking the 'auratic power of death' for a film-performance conjuring trick. That is until Sherwin brings us to our corporeal senses: the inexplicable slither of the knife-slash through the skin of the screen; a horrifying, mesmerising moment; revealing that 'one state feeds on the other' – our lifelessness as an audience, held in immersive spectacle, feeds on the 'formless liveliness' of a moving coil of film.

Sherwin's *Paper landscape* complicates Lyotard's formula, 'ESTRANGEMENT would appear to be a precondition for landscape.'[340] For here the estrangement happens through the combination of incongruous media. There is the enchantment with the projected image that has slowly been 'unveiled' on our retinal screens by 'magic' paint on the plastic one; there is the swirling graininess of Super 8 film, encouraging imaginative projection into the scene,[341] combined with a familiar enactment of a picturesque visual journey as Sherwin runs into the distance; and there is the violent rupture, where Sherwin's disappearance, a temporal and perspectival vanishing point, becomes the site where a bleaker landscape erupts into our consciousness – the defamiliarised surroundings of wherever the film-performance is taking place.

*Paper Landscape* presents a screen through which enchantment and rupture coalesce; where past, present and future inhabit the same location, at the incomprehensible moment when the phantasmic, life-giving/life-taking screen is slashed. The desire for a return to nature is shown to be a romantic projection, heightened by the audience's emotional investment in the real Sherwin's conflicted role as both magician and slave (just like the audience). This is augmented by the

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[338] T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: an experirment in art writing* (Yale University Press, 2006), p. 241.

[339] Ibid.

[340] Jean-François Lyotard, *Scapeland,* from *The Inhuman.* Polity Press, 1991, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby.

[341] Super 8 film has always been the poor relation of higher gauge film stock. Its material qualities always noticed, and often appreciated by structural filmmakers.

realisation that the filming would have required an intricate choreography, limited by the temporal limitations of super 8: the 3m 20s of a cartridge, shooting at 18 frames per second (the technical reason for the two instances where the filmed Sherwin has to leave the frame).[342]

In the final shamanic act of the performance, the liberated Sherwin 'carries' the ever-diminishing and increasingly blurred landscape back into the midst of the audience on his body. The landscape will remain within our collective imaginations, as we are left in the dark after the diabolic projector is turned off, just before the film... *runs out.*

[342] The attentive viewer, even if unaware of the temporal strictures of super 8, is aware that the film cartridge has been changed by a slight jump in the continuity.

## Background

A paralysed woman was still able to accurately control a computer cursor with her thoughts 1000 days after having a tiny electronic device implanted in her brain, say the researchers who devised the system. The achievement demonstrates the longevity of brain-machine implants. ... Her first task was to move a cursor on a computer screen to targets arranged in a circle and select each one in turn. The second required her to follow and click on a target as it moved around the screen in varying sizes. ... The researchers say there is no evidence of any fundamental incompatibility between the sensor and the brain.[343]

The future of augmented-reality technology is here – as long as you're a rabbit. Bioengineers have placed the first contact lenses containing electronic displays into the eyes of rabbits as a first step on the way to proving they are safe for humans. ... The first version may only have one pixel, but higher resolution lens displays – as those seen in *Terminator* – could one day be used as satnav enhancers showing you directional arrows for example, or flash up texts and emails - perhaps even video.[344]

Scientists have picked up fragments of people's thoughts by decoding the brain activity caused by words that they hear. The remarkable feat has given researchers fresh insight into how the brain processes language, and raises the tantalising prospect of devices that can return speech to the speechless. Though in its infancy, the work paves the way for brain implants that could monitor a person's thoughts and speak words and sentences as they imagine them.[345]

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[343] Helen Thomson, biomedical news editor, New Scientist, March 2011, www.new scientist.com/blogs/shortsharpscience/2011/03/power-of-thought-neural-implan.html

[344] Paul Marks, senior technology correspondent, New Scientist November 2011, www.newscientist.com/blogs/onepercent/2011/11/electronic-contact-lens-displa. html

[345] Ian Sample, science correspondent, The Guardian, January 2012. http://www. guardian.co.uk/science/2012/jan/31/mind-reading-program-brain-words

153 February 2012: photograph of a government poster campaign alerting the general public (pictured as a slightly bewildered robot) of the impending shutdown of the analogue television signal – the end of interference or agitation.

154 **Allan Otte**, *Fjernsyn* (Television) (2009), acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.

155 **Ilya Kabakov**, *TV Landscape* (1960/2005), oil on TV set.

[346] Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1987), trans. Bernard & Caroline Schutze (Semiotext(e), 1988), p. 74. [QR encoded].

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