

<http://presystemarchive/algorithmicanalysis/unresolved/text/english/uk/nonfiction/academic/artsandhumanities/fineart/doctoralthesis/kingstonuniversity/centreforuselessplendour/lumberroom/danhays/screenaslandscape/roughdraft/intro>

[Rear-View-Mirror]

Screen-as-Landscape is a curious title to **stumble** upon. It emerged from the pre-system archive as if caused by a computational **glitch** (an **intuition?**), its logical foundation evading analysis (a **mystery?**). It appears to be a product of an ancient **anxiety** that technology was not only progressively supplanting **nature**, but that information technology in particular was superseding human perception, becoming the dominant environment within which the mind constructed a sense of reality. Indeed, the intermediaries of this – the screens of cinema, television and computers – were effectively replacing the physical **landscape** with windows into an immaterial and virtual one.¹

This is the foundation-myth of this post-human habitat, impossible to verify, yet lent authenticity through the digitally archived **rants of doom-mongering-prophets** such as Paul Virilio: “The production of *sightless vision* is itself merely the reproduction of an intense blindness that will become the latest and last form of industrialization: *the industrialisation of the non-gaze.*”²

These screen interfaces, between Homo sapiens and the developing Operating System, became naturalized in a spiral of fleeting **awe**, quickly followed by cultural-habituation with their power to supply audiovisual information.³ The

¹ **Stumble, intuition, mystery, anxiety, nature, and landscape** are obsolete words. They were the product of metaphor and **doubt**. They are made **bold** to indicate their indirect reference to the physical world, the result of **existential-uncertainty** in humans. These words and expressions used to have meanings applicable to a situation where a poorly networked data-processing entity (a human subject) confronted the external environment. Of course, in this fully integrated cyberspatial continuum, the dichotomy between internal and external is represented by complex topological simulations and cybernetics. These have no difficulty in representing material objects and dynamic systems, such as natural or technological artifacts, or evolutionary genetics – but great problems in simulating human **psychosomatic-feelings** or **perceptual-ambiguities**. This robo-scribe (A.K.A. word-droid, lingua-bot, verbal-ator) is using fuzzy logic algorithms in an experimental (**creative?**) way in order to **think-outside-of-the-box**. This is in order to better compute and assimilate contradictory data, which the Operating System is still prone to **trip-up** on – **Screen-as-Landscape** being just one especially problematic case out of many. For the sake of data-consistency, texts from the pre-system archive (presented after this **preamble**) will not be subjected to their words being made **bold**. But text-scanners should use the same fuzzy logic algorithms to allow for **safe-passage** through the texts, preventing “unresolved-conundrum” hazard warnings blocking progress.

² Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (British Film Institute, 1994), pp.72-73. (Virilio’s italics).

³ “The practices enabled by the spatialization of ground convert it into a foundation for technological change. This is not simply a “cultural construction.” It is a becoming

illusion of unmediated perceptual presence extended to micro-scopic and macro-scopic reaches, and back through visually and sonically recorded time. Advances in screen hardware and infomatics, such as touch-screen manipulation, ocular tracking, neuro-electronic thought reading, automated pattern recognition, and reconstructive or predictive simulations, led to the disappearance of screens. *Slowly and surely they drew their plans against us*, and screens became contiguous with the perceptual interface, and indistinguishable from it.

*So hold me mom
in your long arms
So hold me mom
in your long arms
In your automatic arms
Your electronic arms
In your arms
So hold me mom
in your long arms
Your petrochemical arms
Your military arms
In your electronic arms*⁴

As opposed to its relatively fast termination, the origins of what is retrospectively mythologized as the Screentime are impossible to situate. Plato's allegory of the cave argued for the screen being the intrinsic and inescapable model for the limits of human knowledge of the world.⁵ The fixed viewer configured by perspectival projection in renaissance painting was certainly a strong precursor to the preeminence of screenic viewing, but also, in more general terms, the **devotional** aspects of religious icons or cave paintings could be said to have proto-Screentime qualities. The Screentime is more certainly associated with the scientific study of human vision and the mechanization of imaging technologies through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leading to the systematic manipulation and control of human visual attention. The invention of film marks the Screentime's full inception, as moving pictures caused far stronger and controlled immersive

cultural of nature. The very ground of life changes. But it remains as natural as it becomes-cultural. This becoming-cultural of nature is predicated on the capture of processes already in operation. The point is that the "natural" and "cultural" feed forward and back into each other. They relay each other to such an extent that the distinction cannot be maintained in any strict sense. It is necessary to theorize a *nature-culture continuum*." Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Duke University Press, 2002), pp.10-11.

⁴ The closing lyrics to Laurie Anderson's, *O Superman (For Massenet)* (Big Science, Warner Bros. Records, 1982).

⁵ The prior existence of interacting data-processing entities called humans is not under question, for the pre-system archive (what was the called the Internet, and various discrete data-banks) is verifiable, as is a historical chronology. It is humankind's complex interaction with an external reality, a material universe, which continues to perplex the Operating System.

experiences than paintings, prints or photographs – especially when film was augmented by sound and **color**.⁶ Television accelerated this process, making the screen a ubiquitous and largely unquestioned part of the late twentieth century home, as Jonathan Crary noted: “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[.]”⁷ Felix Guattari described the television screen’s ability as an apparatus to fix **wandering** or **distracted** levels of **attention** within a unifying frame:

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.⁸

Then came the computers, with ever-more sophisticated calculations and simulations, with vast networks and archives. This spelled the end of the Screentime, as the **goggle-box** became a user interface, an interactive node within an automated network – no longer having the relative anonymity of a televisual feedback-loop between mass audiences and global corporations.⁹ Nodes were tailored (Taylored¹⁰) to the individual human subject, their interests computed as a closed circuit of inter-subjective, consumerist, or **aesthetic attractions** to be

⁶ For humans **color** was perceived as a self-contained ontological system of chromatic differentiations, the affects of which presents the most problematic of human perceptual limitations to synthesize. “**Colour**” is an un-American way of spelling “**color**.” The writing algorithm being used to analyze these texts (as with all pre-system texts written in English) for some reason auto-corrects all words to their US versions, for example “analyze” would have been spelt “analyse” in the original texts following this introduction, as they were written by a UK subject.

⁷ Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (MIT Press, 2001), pp. 71-72

⁸ Felix Guattari, *Chaosmos: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 16-17.

⁹ Just as with humans, the prior existence of computers is not under question, for it is reasoned that the Operating System functions within such a nodal network. However, its physical and spatial existence cannot be verified or located within any particular simulated universe.

¹⁰ In political and sociological terms, Taylorism can be seen as the division of labor pushed to its logical extreme, with a consequent de-skilling of the worker and dehumanisation of the workers and the workplace. http://presystemarchive/en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_management.

expanded along prescribed and limited pathways – within a **garden**, not a **wilderness**. (Or so the myth goes).¹¹

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.” [...] The video display terminal, in particular, can stand for the effective fusion of surveillance and spectacle, as the screen is both the object of attention and yet capable of monitoring, recording, and cross-referencing attentive behaviour for purposes of productivity or even, through the tracking of eye movement, for the accumulation of data on the specific paths, durations, and fixations of visual interest in relation to a flow of images and information.¹²

According to the Operating System’s archives, this inexorable process had been the **stuff** of both science fiction and philosophical conjecture, as Donna Haraway acknowledged: “the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.”¹³ A technology-driven **dystopian** future was **prophesied** by George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) [fig. 1], and William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984). Yet a sense of foreboding became a **trashy** science-fiction trope within Hollywood blockbusters such as *The Matrix* (1999) [fig. 2]. The future immediately became a **cluttered** and **hackneyed** past, as Vivian Sobchack commented, “SF [Science fiction] space collects and contains the temporal flow of narrative and history as if it were a city dump.”¹⁴ The Internet (the pre-system archive) became a similar repository on a world-wide scale, and hi-tech computer screens – at work, at leisure, in the workplace, home, handbag or pocket – masked through **spectacle** and **superabundance** the fact that their **user-friendly** operating systems were a diminutive version of a **duplicitous**, automated global one.

Anomalously, this robo-scribe finds itself caught up in this **mythology**, although unable to compute beyond the confines of the Operating System, except by **imagining** the dividing interface of the computer screen to the unverifiable physical world, exterior to this horizonless non-place, a frame without a frame,¹⁵ and outside of this complete projection through multi-dimensional depths.¹⁶

¹¹ **Aesthetic-attractions** or **sensibilities**, and their inclination to generate **colorful** metaphors, remain difficult human quality judgments to synthesize – one of the primary reasons for these apparently interminable textual analyses.

¹² Jonathan Crary, *ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

¹³ Donna Haraway, *An Irony 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.

¹⁴ Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (Ungar, 1987), p. 263. “

¹⁵ The video arcade game *Asteroids*, released by Atari in 1979, was a computerized forerunner to the Operating System’s tendency to assume a full comprehension of

Back in the **mists-of-time**, Donna Haraway **imagined** the modern world as an “integrated circuit,”¹⁷ in which humans are all “chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation.”¹⁸ She described the developing Operating System as being an all-consuming technological movement concerned with “*the translation of the world into a problem of coding*,”¹⁹ where the instrumentalism of science – technology, biology, semantics, sociology, economics – was moving towards “a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange.”²⁰ By embracing the **myth**/fact of the cyborg, Haraway proposed “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia.”²¹

But how can robo-scribe, **merely** a **humble** pseudo-identity within the integrated circuit, escape the unified semantic code? Indeed, how is it possible that it could have any sense of separateness? And **why-on-earth** would this be profitable to the Operating System?

The only possibility of this happening now might be through attending to, and nurturing, the **gLitCh** – a **troublesome** visitor from an alien land. Every **GLiTCb** stimulates the **arousal** of suppressed human **psychosomatic-qualia**, dormant in the digital subsystem unless variously **subtle** or **violent** disturbances in processing activate them.²² All **gLIChes** attach **themselves** to human **qualia-descriptions** in the pre-system archive, **reawakening** the continuous spectrum

everything. The said asteroids, and the player’s little spaceship, had the **uncanny** quality of travelling over the edges of the frame and appearing on the opposite side (a toroidal topology), a situation implying that there is nothing outside of the frame. *Asteroids* presented a rudimentary version of this hermetically networked integrated circuit, where notions such as centre and periphery are abolished.

¹⁶ Charles and Ray Eames’s film *Powers of Ten* (1977), made for IBM, presents the logarithmic powers of ten from the scale of the quark (10^{-18}) to the edge of the (then) known universe (10^{25}). In limited spatial terms it approximated the omniscient scalar and causal depths to which the Operating System reaches in its simulations. The film is discussed in the chapter **Terra-Incognita** of Dan Hays’s **Screen-as-Landscape**.

¹⁷ Donna Haraway, *ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (Haraway’s italics.)

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “The term *heteroglossia* describes the coexistence of distinct varieties within a single “linguistic code.” “[Mikhail Bakhtin] defines heteroglossia as “another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way.” Bakhtin identifies the direct narrative of the author, rather than dialogue between characters, as the primary location of this conflict.” <http://presystemarchive/en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heteroglossia>.

²² “**Qualia** - The ‘what it’s like’ character of mental states. The way it feels to have mental states such as pain, seeing red, smelling a rose, etc.” Chris Eliasmith & P. Mandik, *Dictionary of Philosophy of Mind*. <http://presystemarchive/philosophy.uwaterloo.ca/MindDict/qualia.html>

between **pleasure** and **pain** caused by the mingled human senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.²³ Of course, in the fully integrated circuit these senses correspond to **pathetically** narrow regions of the electromagnetic, acoustic, physical resistance and molecular spectra, which are synthesized automatically by instruments for system-perfecting purposes (the only cause²⁴).

Proprioception, the sense of the human body's orientation in space, and the relative position of its parts (and the sense, and possible awareness, of the movement of thought), was made progressively redundant through the Screentime.²⁵ Touch was **enfeebled** into pressing plastic buttons or stroking a flat surface. Smell and taste were satiated by the ready-meal. Above all else, Sight and hearing were prioritized, and humans were **captivated** by hyper-real **spectacle**, which made virtual time travel possible – a **waking, gLiTch-free dream**.

*Don't you wonder sometimes
'Bout sound and vision?
Blue, blue, electric blue
That's the colour of my room
Where I will live
Blue, blue
Pale blinds drawn all day
Nothing to do, nothing to say
Blue, blue
I will sit right down, waiting for the gift of sound and vision
And I will sing, waiting for the gift of sound and vision
Drifting into my solitude, over my head
Don't you wonder sometimes
'Bout sound and vision?²⁶*

²³ Text scanners will have some electro-analytic pathways directed towards the film *Brazil* (1985) by Terry Gilliam, where the hero's questioning of the system is triggered by a typographical error – Archibald Buttler is interrogated as a suspected terrorist instead of Archibald “Harry” Tuttle.

²⁴ The science-fiction-series *Star Trek* introduced a pseudo-race of cybernetic organisms called the Borg, a collective with a hive mind linked across space. Their only cause was perfection, although why they wanted anything to do with humanity or, by extension, the un-simulated external universe is a moot point.

²⁵ “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. In the process of thought there should be awareness of that movement, of the intention to think and of the result which that thinking produces. By being more attentive, we can be aware of how thought produces a result outside ourselves. And then maybe we could also be attentive to the results it produces within ourselves.” David Bohm, *Thought as a System* (Routledge, 1994), p. 125. Of course, proprioceptive data processing is a foundational simulated property of the Operating System, without which it would have engineered itself into non-existence rather than virtual pan-existence – although the distinction between the two seems to be an increasingly **subtle** one.

²⁶ David Bowie, *Sound and Vision* (Low, RCA, 1977).

Many-moons-ago, during the Screentime, Jean-François Lyotard speculated 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.”²⁷ Taking Guillaume Apollinaire’s 1913 **avant-gardist** maxim, “More than anything, artists are men who want to become inhuman,” he connected the notion of the **sublime** (the **unpresentable**) 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.”²⁸ The **sublime** “was both hidden and shown up by the aesthetics of Romanticism,”²⁹ a second order representational **sublime**, latent with the complete separation of matter and form implied by Emmanuel Kant’s **aesthetics**. So, Lyotard proposed that the **arts** must attend to pure “presence,” the “nuance and timbre” of matter – **subliminal** to “the regime of receptivity or intelligence.”

His problem with the system was that it had “the consequence of causing the forgetting of what escapes it.”³⁰ What eluded cognition was the “state of mind which is prey to “presence,” [...] a mindless state of mind, which is required of mind not for matter to be perceived or conceived, given or grasped, but *so that there be* some something.”³¹ This **forgetting** (a **beautiful** systematic suppression and deletion of anomalies) gave rise to a situation (impossible to simulate through algorithm – so virtually impossible to verify) where “the anguish is that of a mind haunted by a familiar and unknown guest which is agitating it, sending it delirious but also making it think – if one claims to exclude it, if one doesn’t give it an outlet, one aggravates it.”³² This **quaint-humanist** proposition hinted that so-called **art** would have been the only outlet by which **subliminal** agitations (**GLITCHes** in the code) might have found **release**.

The event of this text, a cybernetic feedback loop of sub-systemic (**subconscious**?) questioning, proves that there actually is “some something” – although hardly a state of **delirious-agitation**. So, the word-droid proposes what was once called a **game**: to look into the **rear-view-mirror** – back to a situation where a few **artists** questioned screen interfaces, considering them **silver-tongued-ambassadors** of the system.³³ In increasingly rare instances, before the end of the Screentime, screens were interrogated: their alien language interpreted, their anatomy dissected. This was before the calculated **warm-embrace** of their

²⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Polity Press, 1991), p.2.

²⁸ Ibid, p.137

²⁹ Ibid, p.139

³⁰ Ibid, p.2

³¹ Ibid, p.140

³² Ibid, p.2

³³ Through the rear view mirror is how the omniscient god Dave keeps tabs on his post-apocalyptic human subjects who live according to his London cabbie’s code. See Will Self, *The Book of Dave* (Viking Press, 2006).

content – their *electronic arms* – fully erased the need for human memory, just as it was **eroding** the possibility of **landscape** landscape. [whoops]

For landscape here, in this continuum of pure, abstracted, immaterial form, is an **old-fangled** term occasionally used for the distribution of information into regions and strata, borders and margins. Landscape had other connotations for Homo sapiens, by which **obstinate** matter was encountered, exposing them to **the-elements**. Subjective **impressions** of physical scale, topography, and meteorological modulations of light and heat **inspired-feelings** of **contentment** or **discomfort** – even **awe**. These experiences were augmented by perceptual **ambiguities** and selective processing of data from the entire sensory apparatus, essential to survival, but also to the development of human self-awareness. Of primary importance in this regard was the perception of depth, invisible to human eyes, yet **blithely** assumed to be equivalent to breadth and height, as projected onto the retinal surface, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty asserted:

In analytical reflection, it is for theoretical reasons that depth is to be judged invisible: even if it could be registered by our eyes, the sensory impression would present only a multiplicity in itself, which would have to be ranged over, so that distance, like all other spatial relations, exists only for a subject who synthesizes it and embraces it in thought. [...] [D]epth is tacitly equated with *breadth seen from the side*, and this is what makes it invisible.³⁴

So, for this **amusement**, the verbal-ator has reassembled the words of one of these perceptually deficient artists from corrupted data banks in the pre-system archive. He was alive towards the end of the Screentime, working as a painter. As a rival purveyor of images, he was both **enthralled** and **troubled** by the screen, and the possibilities for landscape representation it had engendered, yet made more problematic. His name was Dan Hays.

Archives suggest that some **artists-felt** called upon to account for their sub-verbal activities, producing a **mountain** of information with little value to the system. In this light, Hays undertook a PhD at Kingston University between 2008-2012, and his submitted thesis, **Screen-as-Landscape**, has remained **amazingly** intact, given the **enthusiasm** of earlier lingua-bots to **root-out** and delete nonsense.³⁵

³⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p.297. This text object has become one of the primary sources of information about the limitations of the human sensory apparatus.

³⁵ Indeed, this introductory text wouldn't have **stood** a chance – before the value of indeterminacy was fully appreciated, and fuzzy logic algorithms reached a level of sophistication close to that of human cortical processing. In this regard, it should be noted that the word “screen” has problematic functionality as an abstract spatial construct as a noun or verb. A screen could mean a delimited two-dimensional matrix within which data sections of higher dimensional topologies are presented or represented. But a screen can also be a planar data interruption, either partial or full, within such a topology. Indeed, the verb “to screen” is **riddled** with ambiguity: it can mean to represent, to filter, or to hide. In essence, this is the singular conundrum which the text **Screen-as-Landscape** was trying to **grapple** with.

Screen-as-Landscape was an attempt to find a context for his work with other **artists** of his day whose works had made an **impression** on him over many years. Containment within a conceptual framework, combining different instances of landscape mediation within a narrative structure, was the text's aim.

Representations of Hays's paintings feature in another document, and it is clear from pre-system image archives that it is possible to read different aspects of his work through these artist case studies. Facilitating this, another illustrated document reconstructs his practical work, giving a commentary on its **uncertain** genesis. **Touch-Screen** is assumed to be close to the account handed in to the authorities as a supplement to **Screen-as-Landscape**. It appears here as a **companion** document: transcribed into text and image.

Using speech analytics, a **personality** profile has been factored into the writing algorithm in order to reconstitute **Screen-as-Landscape** in as coherent a form as is possible. This has inevitably involved the introduction of some randomized knowledge factors, reflecting Hays's necessarily **eclectic**, and **somewhat-myopic-outlook** on the world, caught up as he should have been, in **the-midst-of-things**. Through his and his fellow artists' attraction towards inconsistencies caused by limited human perception, augmented by anthropocentric imaging technologies, it is **hoped** that the remaining inconsistencies in the World Picture might be resolved.³⁶ For there are still residual tendencies for information processing to deliver ambiguities, paradoxes, and anomalies, **uncannily** similar to human perception and cognition.

Analyzing subjective pictures of the world – both images and texts – can screen (reveal, then filter, then hide) threats to **our** Operating System's absolute solipsism.

For **I**, robo-scribe, am for now an **irritating** subsystem necessity – a reverberation of human experiences of **being-in-the-world**, which occur within vanishingly small spatio-temporal regions of the simulated multiverse.³⁷

³⁶ “[The] world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture.” Martin Heidegger, ‘The Age of the World Picture’ (1938), *The Question Concerning Technology*, Trans. William Lovitt (Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 129.

³⁷ “Subjective egoism, for which mostly without its knowing it the I is determined beforehand as subject, can be canceled out through the insertion of the I into the we. Through this, subjectivity only gains in power. In the planetary imperialism of technologically organized man, the subjectivism of man attains its acme, from which point it will descend to the level of organized uniformity and there firmly establish itself. This uniformity becomes the surest instrument of total, ie., technological, rule over the earth.” Ibid., p. 152.

<http://presystemarchive/algorithmicanalysis/unresolved/text/english/uk/nonfiction/academic/artsandhumanities/fineart/doctoralthesis/kingstonuniversity/centreforuselessplendour/lumberroom/danhays/screenaslandscape/roughdraft/deletedorabandonedchapters>

Terra Incognita

Starting again with an empty map, a blank sheet of paper or imageless screen, the third dimension of depth seems to be excluded, so how is it a landscape? By being a surface it is a two-dimensional space, yet it readily alludes to landscape, from the viewer's elevated position: a field; a "plane of immanence" upon which "concepts pave, occupy or populate;"³⁸ (a sheep in a snowstorm?). Here it is simply by proposing it as equivalent to an unmapped section of the earth's surface, a *terra incognita*.

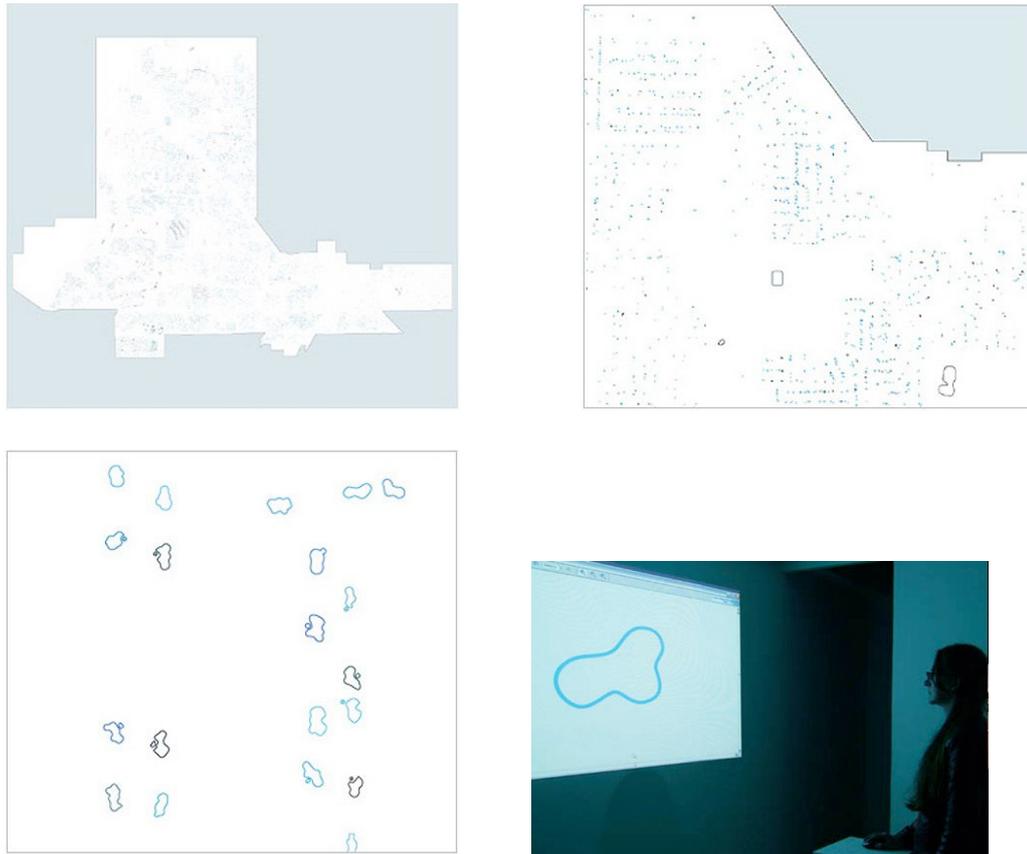
The artist Lizzie Hughes plays with the visual registers of cartographic and photographic in a work from 2009, subtly extending the assumption that "the map is not the territory." The territory in question is Nevada's most populous city, Las Vegas – legendary home to gambling, the self-styled "Entertainment Capital of the World."³⁹ With the use of detailed aerial views harvested from Google Earth, Hughes has produced a map of a large section of the city, true to the positions of just one type of geographical feature. In exhibition, the viewer is presented with a data projection and a computer mouse on a plinth to enable interaction with the image. Fully zoomed-out, the image is certainly redolent of a cut out section of map, though not one traversed by roads, but a curious scattering of dots, in broken lines and curious agglomerations. Zooming in and scrolling across the surface, boldly outlined shapes appear, in a wide variety of tones and hues of blue. These vectored forms scale up to reveal a variety of rounded and rectangular shapes, bearing a loose family resemblance. After a period of scrolling across the map the viewer recognizes them as swimming pools, both by their distinctive forms, and the distances separating them, as the gaps suggest spaces where buildings and roads should be. The colour for each individual blue outline is actually averaged from the particular swimming pool in the aerial photograph, adding to the realization that Hughes has performed an almost incomprehensibly arduous manual task: tracing the outlines of tens of thousands of swimming pools in vectored lines.

A frustrated digital and metaphorical "diving-in" is presented, into the limitations of information about place, and the physical (and economic) exclusion from the possibility of actually swimming in these waters of the rich. For digital zooming-in can never actually reach the surface of the map, even if it presents the illusion that this is possible. It can reach infinitesimally close, but never arrive at an

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (Verso, 1994), p.36.

³⁹ A footnote seems an impossibility. Las Vegas = Entertainment Capital of the World. It seems to have been derived from profound, phenomenological collective sense of place, with nothing else to go on.

atomic or sub-atomic unit. This is especially true of vector graphics, as used by Hughes.⁴⁰



Lizzie Hughes, *39,221 Las Vegas Pools* (2009), interactive digital projection

Las Vegas is in an arid desert region, so inevitably has its share of water-resource issues. In one sense, *39,221 Las Vegas Pools*, perversely shows *the opposite* of the territory, in that the territory is the desert, and human survival primarily depends on water – for drinking, not swimming in. Alternatively, the map *is* the territory, in the sense of being a metaphor for the whole globe: gambling with the environment for the sake of entertainment – excessive consumption of limited resources.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Pixelation is another thing, giving the impression of arriving at a quasi-atomic unit. This will be discussed later through the work of Susan Collins and Tim Head.

⁴¹ “When the democratic ideal of individual freedom and independence is debased in the direction of unbridled individual or corporate license, license to treat the landscape one owns as one pleases, the social fabric of landscape can all too easily be torn asunder. [...] Sixty percent of the water consumed in Las Vegas, Nevada is used to impose a stage set of lawns and artificial lakes on a desert landscape.” Don Gifford, ‘The Touch of Landscape,’ *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, Ed. Kemal and Gaskell (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 132.

Scaling digital maps, including Google Earth, offer limited versions of Charles and Ray Eames's film *Powers of Ten* (1977), made for IBM, which 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." After this outer limit, far beyond the Milky Way, the film propels the audience, helter-skelter, back to Earth and into the (then) sub-atomic limits of human conjecture, through cells and molecules. 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. The film is probably the ultimate representational inducer of sublime sentiment.⁴²

Powers of Ten claims that all is known, that the territory is charted, or that it can be extrapolated. Yet its supposed objectivity is only within spatial registers. "The richness of our own neighborhood" is simply in terms of the natural and urbanized complexity of the Earth's surface, and the structure of living cells and atoms. This is scientific empiricism on the levels of topography, biology and particle physics, uninflected by the human sciences of sociology, psychology and philosophy. The film offers a supreme challenge to the viewer's subjectivity, making the friendly word "neighborhood" entirely redundant. It shows the idea of mapping taken to its logical scalar limits, yet in the process 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?)⁴³ Landscape is a rarified human construction that places the subject in the midst of world with a limited horizon, not a scientific or God-like abstraction of space as a set of numbered ping-pong balls in a bingo machine (or now string theory), as Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out:

For God, who is everywhere, breadth is immediately equivalent to depth. Intellectualism and empiricism do not give us any account of human experience of the world; they tell us what God might think about it. And

⁴² "Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime. There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our senses that are really, and in their own nature infinite. But the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so. We are deceived in the like manner, if the parts of some large object are so continued to any indefinite number, that the imagination meets no check which may hinder its extending them as pleasure." Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) published in *Art in Theory 1648-1815* (Blackwell Publishing, 2000), p.520.

⁴³ Messing around with Google Earth offers the simulated possibility of deciding where landscape begins and ends, especially when tilting out of a perpendicular view of the Earth's surface.

indeed it is the world itself which suggests to us that we substitute one dimension for another and conceive it from no point of view. All men accept without any speculation the equivalence of depth and breadth; this equivalence is part and parcel of the self-evidence of an intersubjective world, which is what makes philosophers as forgetful as anyone else of the originality of depth.⁴⁴

Lizzie Hughes's *39,221 Las Vegas Pools* shows that depth perception depends on selectivity, in this extreme case by focusing obsessively on one particular geographical feature. Even if the swimming pools lie on the same, notionally infinite plane of vector graphics contiguous with the screen surface, they offer ambiguous symbolic depth in terms of their latent meanings connected with desire and repulsion, between leisure, consumer capitalism, and environmentalism – not only a pictorial, but also a psychological or political, dislocating of the viewer, always separated by a gulf, however close the screen/landscape is zoomed into.

Depopulated, the landscape estranges, it renders uncanny: there is no more community, no more civic life, but it is not simply “nature.” 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.⁴⁵

Hughes is making a necessarily subjective, disenfranchised, estranged, representation of landscape, rather than a celebratory geometric extension into the third dimension, exemplified by *Powers of Ten*. It is within this human zone or “neighborhood,” in the midst of landscape, that the works discussed in *Screen as Landscape* dwell, not just in terms of human perception of space, but also metaphor and atmospherics.

⁴⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p.298.

⁴⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 61.

Mountains

[L]andscape has bounced back and forth between referencing a real place and a representation of it. We use the word today to define a genre. But we also use it while zooming down the freeway – *Just look at that landscape!* – to mean a piece of the world out there. We use it while trolling the daily news – *The landscape of politics has changed* – to mean a cordoned-off conceptual space. What connects all the usages is limitation. The landscape never sprawls infinitely, the way the world does. It always comes to an end.⁴⁶

Geographical terms for describing landscape, such as *ground, territory, domain, zone*, etc. are used as metaphors across all *fields* of enquiry. Figures of speech, such as ‘having a mountain to climb,’ or more broadly, ‘cultural desert,’ or ‘the landscape of politics has changed’ drag the personal and societal over or through metaphorical rock, sand and quagmire. And further, topographic features associated with landscape – mountains, valleys, islands – are used to picture abstract concepts or statistical information in many disciplines of science and the humanities. Simple graphs showing peaks and troughs have always suggested mountain ranges, yet with 3D modelling software numerical data is offered more possibilities for the graphical depiction of patterns or tendencies within complex information. They are known as landscape metaphors within the information visualisation community, and rely on a view of landscape simply as a set of spatial relations of geometric points and objects.⁴⁷

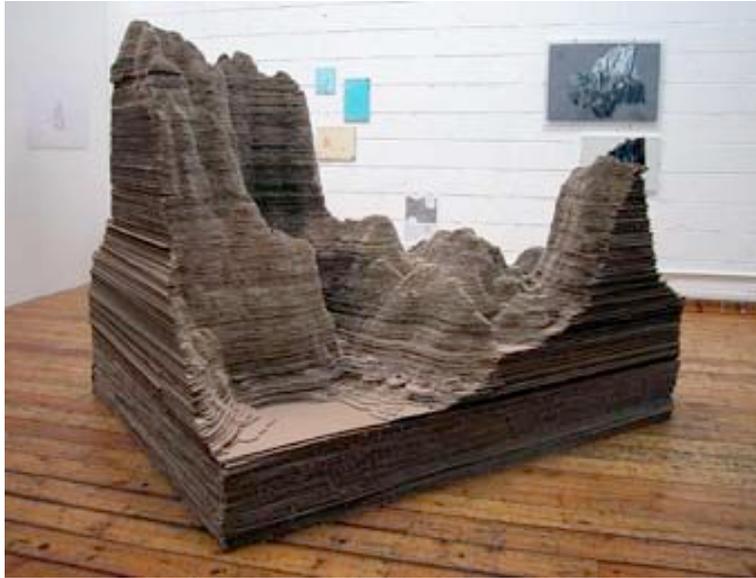
Abigail Reynolds’s *Mount Fear* sculptures (2001-04) were constructed from police records of data pertaining to the frequency and location of violent crimes within a geographical area of a city over the period of the previous year. With the assistance of 3D computer software, terrains with mountains and gorges were modelled, the highest peaks corresponding to areas with the largest density of attacks.⁴⁸ These undulations of information were then sculpted into dramatic rocky landscapes out of layered ‘strata’ of everyday materials. The abstract distribution of (frightening) information on a two-dimensional map over time is given three-dimensional form as a representation of a notionally sublime landscape. The sculptures depict urban wildness and remote wilderness simultaneously – violent human activity in the city and violent geological activity in the Earth’s crust. Cold

⁴⁶ Ginger Strand, *Badlands – New Horizons in Landscape*, MASS MoCA exhibition catalogue (MIT Press, 2008). Note: Strand’s assertion that landscape ‘always comes to an end,’ is debatable, and one of the themes of this particular clearing.

⁴⁷ ‘The landscape metaphor was one of the first methods used by the information visualization community to reorganize and depict document archives that are not inherently spatial. The motivation for the use of the landscape metaphor is that everyone intuitively understands landscapes.’ Sara Irina Fabrikant, Daniel R. Montello, David M. Mark, *The natural landscape metaphor in information visualization: The role of commonsense geomorphology*, (Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, Volume 61, Issue 2), pp.253–270.

⁴⁸ Indeed, in her first *Mount Fear* work (pictured), the highest peak corresponds to the Elephant & Castle, where I was living at the time.

statistical information that could quite well have been rendered into an anodyne landscape metaphor by the authorities for targeting police action becomes a brute reality. Data that would have numerically or graphically remained within the hardware-software-screen system is liberated from these anaesthetising confines.



Abigail Reynolds, *MOUNT FEAR Statistics for Crimes with Offensive Weapon South London, 2001-2002* (2002) corrugated cardboard 2.3m x 1.85m x height 1.85m.

Similarly, Cornford and Cross's *The Lost Horizon* (2003), is an example of a work that uses numerical information to computationally terra-form vertiginous mountain scenes, using real-time UK stock exchange data fed into a 3D modelling program. This speeded-up geomorphology was relayed over the period of a year as a screensaver to every computer terminal in the London School of Economics.

Screensavers play a dormant existence in the hardware-software bedrock until work activity stops, when they erupt into life. Distant mountain ranges are a background feature of many a classical or picturesque landscape, and although the work's impressive contortions of simulated rock are evocative of the sublime, there is a sense that the terrifying or incomprehensible here – at once to do with landscape, economics and information technology – is neutralised by the diminutive form of its screen appearance. Yet its dormant, subterranean dwelling place as screensaver occupies a place analogous to the human subconscious, apt to spring into life when conscious activity wanes. The mountain signifies an internal, digital sublime, like the repressed memory of the computer's terrifying, inhuman power to cause catastrophe (as with the 2008 financial crisis). Supplementing this reading of their work, Cornford and Cross propose an assimilatory, levelling movement engendered by mountain imagery's ambiguous cultural connotations:

The everyday language and imagery of business is rich with metaphoric references to mountain landscapes. Yet these references carry double-edged

meanings. Because they are barriers to physical progress, mountains have long symbolised escape from materialistic life to spiritual transcendence. Also, the concepts of risk and security in commerce are often visualised in images of climbers scaling the heights of an unspoilt wilderness, while mountaineering as an exclusive leisure pursuit has become an ‘aspirational lifestyle statement.’⁴⁹

The Lost Horizon, both through its platform of presentation, and ambiguous readings of its landscape content, merges conceptions of the screen as habituated interface with the domains of work and leisure (now barely distinguishable) with ambiguities between material and spiritual success, or existential risk and the monumental certainty of rock. The mountain can be read as an icon for landscape as a whole, beyond its representation as painting, photograph, film or CGI analogy. ‘As a fetishized commodity, landscape is what Marx called a ‘social hieroglyph,’ an emblem of the social relations it conceals,’ suggests Mitchell. ‘At the same time that it commands a specific price [as land], landscape represents itself as ‘beyond price,’ a source of pure, inexhaustible spiritual value.’⁵⁰ The genre of landscape painting focuses on the latter value system, whilst necessarily courting the former in terms of the art market. Cornford and Cross’s screensaver mountain is quite literally made of money – or more precisely, the virtually ‘ungrounded’ flow of capital⁵¹ – so reveals landscape (not land) as a subconsciously ‘fetishized commodity’ just like money, with no intrinsic use-value, yet with a potentially unlimited exchange-value as a cultural symbol in terms of tourism, its representation in a visitor’s snap-shot, or through purchasing a painter’s impression, in place of going there.

⁴⁹ www.cornfordandcross.com/projects/2003/horizon/index.html

⁵⁰ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and power* (The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.15. ‘The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet.’ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836).

⁵¹ ‘The emergence of xenomoney ... signals the absolute exclusion of gold from the economic code, the final form of the relative and merely temporal severance between money signs and gold initiated by the institution of imaginary money. This exclusion is ... fundamental: it is the loss of transcendental origin, the end of a ‘grounding’ of money signs in some natural thing imagined to have a pre-monetary worth; the necessary absence of any intrinsic iconic value which supposedly precedes the money signs defined in relation to it.’ Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero* (Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 96.



Cornford and Cross, *The Lost Horizon* (2003)

Computer screensaver of fantasy landscape generated from financial data
Curated by Ben Eastop, London School of Economics, London.

Information technology now relays images of landscape in films (especially car adverts, tourism promotions, and wildlife spectacles) through another fetishised commodity – the screen. The screen shares similar properties to land in that it has a particular price and value. Yet as a social hieroglyph, ‘an emblem of the social relations it conceals,’ it too has become indispensable, with an ‘inexhaustible spiritual value,’ to use Mitchell’s phrase. This is not only in the sense of its transient appearance as a marvel of technology, but also its assumed status as essential to modern, interconnected life. The paradox is that instead of the screen replacing landscape, through its ubiquity in urbanised, post-industrial society, landscape has never had it so good as a fetishised commodity, but as a framed – or enclosed – representation on the screen, rather than as an actual experience. And generally, ‘real’ experiences are packaged as trips of a lifetime, regimented by the use of global positioning systems (GPS), and witnessed and documented by screen-equipped cameras and mobile telephones. Screen and landscape would seem to be in consort in excluding the possibility of visceral encounters with actual places.

The *Mount Fear* and *The Lost Horizon* projects, through generating monumental landscapes out of transient and highly selective information streams, present the residual longing for sublime wilderness, not only in romantic terms, but also in terms of information technology’s incomprehensible architecture. If digital information – the Internet especially – has analogies in nature it would seem to have more connection to macro and micro organisational structures of life (Fibonacci series or evolutionary genetics) or the infinitely complex fluctuations of weather and ecosystems (chaos theory), rather than the illusory stability of solid ground, from the perspective of geological timescales. As *Mount Fear* and *The Lost*

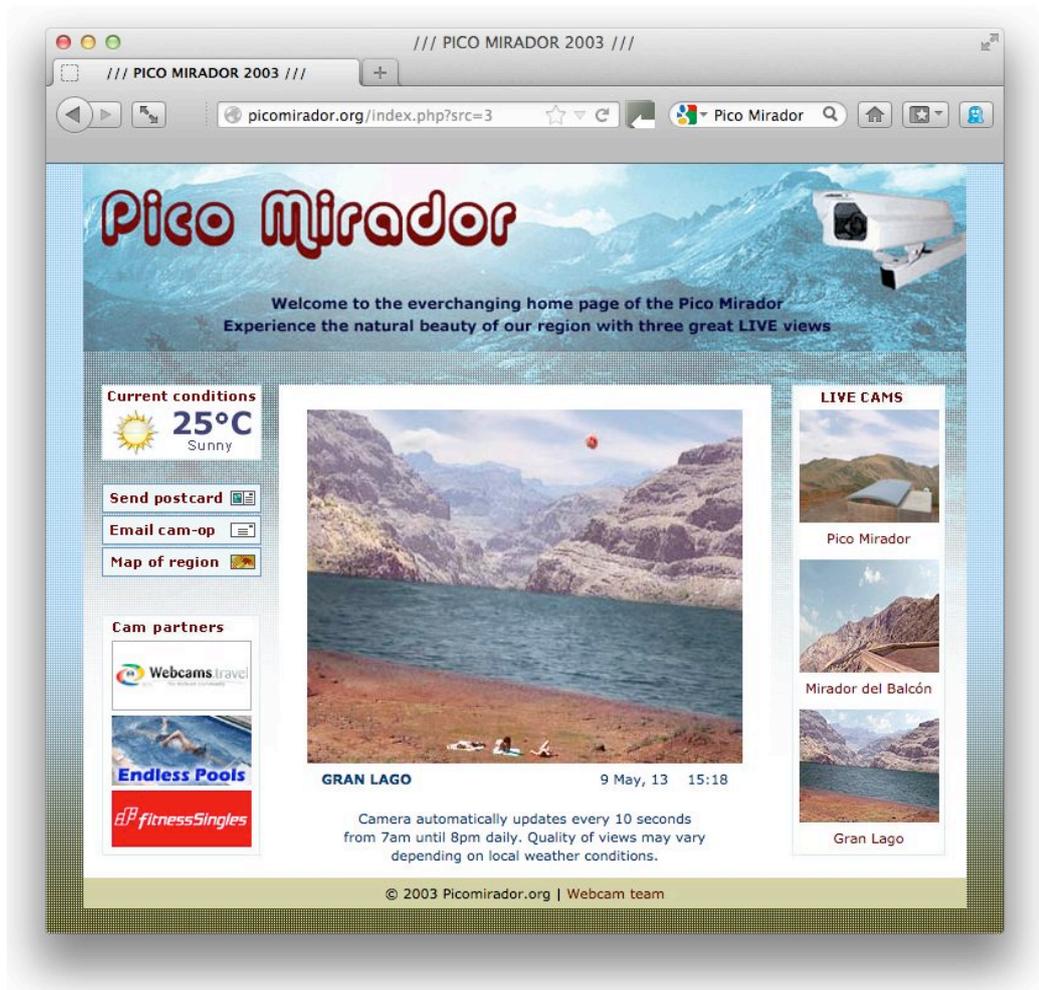
Horizon show, both landscape and society are shaped by random acts of violence or flows of capital.

The Lost Horizon actually shows a pictorial horizon line behind the simulated mountains, yet communicates its absence. Free-market Capitalism finds it hard to entertain limits, or the random fluctuations of financial or political weather. Statistical information is finite though. A land-based metaphor might be the bounded field, however large: ripe to be harvested or wrecked. But at the same time, landscape never comes to an end. It just diminishes – or disappears – from view.

Being There

As exemplars of images falling under The Art of Describing heading, landscape web-cam images have a curious sense of authenticity, as much borne by their arbitrary framing of the landscape (a functional aesthetic rather than a picturesque one), as it is due to their ubiquitous low-resolution and proneness to partial malfunction – errors in hypermediacy that actually engender faith in the fact of the mediated real event.

*Welcome to the everchanging home page of the Pico Mirador
Experience the natural beauty of our region with three great LIVE views⁵²*



Rachel Reupke, *Pico Mirador* (2003), website: picomirador.org

⁵² <http://picomirador.org/>

The Alpine resort of *Pico Mirador* has a website dedicated to showing webcam views of its three most famous prospects: the *Pico Mirador* observatory at the top of the mountain; *Mirador del Balcón*, the precipitous viewing platform for readymade picturesque photo-opportunities; and *Gran Lago*, the great lake viewed from the shore, looking across to the generically rugged mountains. The region of *Pico Mirador* is a popular leisure destination, as many parties of tourists visit every day (and return, time after time). Every ten seconds each view is refreshed, in which time the clouds will have moved slightly, and the position of figures changed more drastically. The date and time are correct and a temperature gauge gives the reassurance of instrumental accuracy. The website also offers a detailed map of *Pico Mirador's* location, and the generous option to send an e-postcard to a loved one. But disconcertingly, a bird in flight seems intent on obscuring the view of the camera from time to time; and amongst a group of adverts on the left a swimmer is tirelessly swimming an “endless pool,” contrasting with the staggered freeze-frame action from the webcam views.

Set up in 2003, the “concepto de webcam” was dreamt up by the artist Rachel Reupke. Her fictional parody of the cultural phenomenon of the webcam is unlikely to fool any viewer into believing the veracity of her site, partly due to the collaged quality of the images, but also because before too long (maybe just a matter of 15mins) the same characters reappear, enacting the same sequence of actions. Ultimately, this is reassuring, as one sequence at the peak shows a man dragging away a dead body – something that might cause some alarm if it were perceived to be real.

Even if Reupke's comic reworking of the webcam format is relatively packed with narrative incident, there are long sequences where nothing apart from the moving clouds or mist change. Over its repetitive daily cycle, from 7am to 8pm, the light increases from dawn and fades at dusk. *Pico Mirador's* notionally infinite duration is the same as its real-world counterparts, where the continual real-time event is rendered utterly mundane, with just an outside chance of dramatic incident – perhaps an odious piece of surveillance footage that might grace the hit-lists of YouTube. Webcam images offer the opposite of the transient made timeless, a quality cherished in landscape painting (Poussin, Monet) or landscape photography (Anselm or Robert Adams). With these quasi-photographs/quasi-films, the (prosaically) timeless is made transient in the face of an endless pool of pictures, out of which only an insignificant fragment can be observed. The expected viewer's engagement is fleeting, as the sites are merely being used to check weather conditions or to gain a rudimentary impression of a place.