

Between landscapes and vistas in Denise Agassi's creation process

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Because the universe exploded into satellites, the landscape was chopped up, arranged, built with art... (Cauquelin, 2007:177)

The dream of expanding the potential of vision cuts across humanity's path. From the simple gesture of seeking elevated surfaces and the height of mountains to the development of technical apparatuses (telescopes, binoculars, satellites, webcams, among others), one can trail the search for an expanded gaze. The building of watchtowers and belvederes, places that command panoramic vistas are also examples that tell us of this desire to glimpse a landscape unveiled to the eye.

In "Vista On Vista Off # 2", a *net art installation* (as dubbed by the artist Denise Agassi), a central device invites us to an exercise of expanded gazing through the communication networks and online databases.

The Project echoes artworks such as "Place-Ruhr" (2000) by Jeffrey Shaw, and, although in this installation the gaze's wanderings is restricted to the Ruhr areas, both pieces bear similarities such as the association between the corporal movements of the interactor and the access to the pieces' image content; and the physical presence of a platform through which the visitor interacts.

"Vista On Vista Off # 2", in its turn, projects a gaze that treads a planispheric visualisation of the Earth, by means of the representation of the whole of the terrestrial surface fit into a rectangular plane, the system leads us to geographical points. In the creative process, the artist has chosen a system in which such points correspond to tags, labels pointing to videos found in YouTube.

Agassi's installation also dialogues with projects that revisit the panoramas of old. "The Visitor: Living by Numbers" (2001) by Luc Courchesne, and "Be Now Here" (1995–2002) by Michael Naimark are other contemporary references that investigate what Oliver Grau has denominated the "exegesis of panoramas". In this sense, the piece harks back to the ancient experiments with immersive spaces such as the "Villa dei Misteri" (1st Century b.C.), an old Roman villa next to the city of Pompeii and the panoramas built by Robert Barker. In the "Villa dei Misteri", for instance, frescoes are placed on an architectural panorama, picturing a series of initiation rituals dedicated to the cult of Dionysius. The scenes with life-size figures and realistic representations, according to Grau, worked as a portal to a hybrid reality. Barker, in his turn, conceived an artificial immersive space of landscape paintings arranged on a 360° circular frame. His first panorama depicted Edinburgh's cityscape (1788) and was a huge success both as an instrument of military strategy as well as entertainment media for the masses.

But, what kind of landscapes are unveiled in the project "Vista On Vista Off # 2"? Interacting with the system leads us to choose geographical locations. Similar to a compass, the act of turning the device corresponds to the act of pointing to a particular coordinate. Thus, the cardinal points, North, South, East and West are reborn as "passwords" that trigger the unveiling of the videos. Grounded on what Lev Manovich denominated *database aesthetics*, "Vista On Vista Off # 2" appropriates the videographic production of the net to compose its landscapes. The same procedure was present in other of the artist's pieces, such as "Online Monument Christ Redeemer" (which uses images obtained by means of a search system and tags); "Vista On Vista Off # 1" (which associates images selected from an online database and images from Google Earth).

The poetics that resort to databases explore the creative potential that inhabits the core of digital languages. The project, as it deals with non-linear systems and as it organises complexities, operates crucial issues of combinatory art. What are the limits of the process' control? How does the system's programming interfere in the updating of the images? How does the tag system filter and choose images that are unveiled and concealed? These and other issues emerge from the experience with the apparatus. Further still, they invite us to reflect about aspects of culture's

contemporary condition, as well as the infinite possibilities of data organisation and reprogramming . As so clearly put by Manuel de Landa:

"... our world is governed not only by non-linear dynamics, which renders execution and control forecasting impossible, but also by non-linear combinatory analysis, which implies that the number of possible mixtures in networks and hierarchies, of command and of market, of centralisation and decentralisation, are huge and that we simply cannot foresee which emergent properties of such innumerable combinations will be" (De Landa, 2000:273).

The subject has the opportunity to perceive the building process of a "vista", a fleeting landscape that opens up in layers and rhythms, in the act of immersing in the experimentation with the device. And the videos that are triggered by the tags, more like portraits of places, are records that tell us about digital coding of culture. In its diversity, the material processed by the project affirms and maps out the presence of plural gazes that share the same territory, the same longing.

Another of the project's pressing issue is related to what Nicolas Bourriaud has denominated "Post-Production". For the French thinker, the exercise of reorganising pre-existing elements in the search of new meanings is part of contemporary art production. Thus, by means of its mechanisms for the visualisation of stored data, Agassi's work invites us to a reconfiguration of the landscape. However, the transparencies of the installation make it stand apart from its classic function of rendering light (such as the velatura technique of pictorial tradition). Folds that unfold in time, Agassi's layers are representations of the pulsing of the access to a database. But, above all, Agassi's piece leads us into adventures that demand cognitive postures incorporating the flavours of combinatory unpredictability and rhythms of access. And thus we can, once again, talk about landscapes, recovering the etymological meaning of "extension of land encompassed by the gaze".

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