Mural and Landscape Painting Revisited
The Art of Mapping the Digital Technosphere

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Abstract   The elusive dimensionality and ecologically entangled materiality of clouds have always made it hard to map and visually depict them. But while visual artists of the Romantic and Impressionist eras at last managed to relate the ecological entanglement of man-made clouds and their 'natural' counterparts, the twenty-first century is facing another challenging addition to the almanac of clouds: the cloud of the digital technosphere. In this article, artistic attempts at capturing its dimensional elusiveness and invisible ecological entanglement will be presented which draw both on previous representational strategies and on innovative practices to render visible this quasi-autonomous force of planetary magnitude.

Keywords   Art. Digitalisation. Ecology. Clouds. Hyperobjects.

Summary   1 When is a Cloud a Cloud?. –2 Digital Clouds Everywhere. – 3 Cloudy Thinking, or: Staying with the Trouble of Unrepresentability. – 4 Romantic Landscape Painting Revisited. – 5 Renaissance Mural Painting Revisited. – 6 Reconnaissance.

Clouds always tell a true story,
but one that is difficult to read.
(Abercromby 1887, 163)

1 When is a Cloud a Cloud?

Mapping the heavenly, celestial or meteorological spheres of clouds has always been a challenging but desirable enterprise for philosophers, poets and painters alike: while the components that make up the natural occurrence in the sky which is called a cloud can be analysed and listed, the precise moment the various ingredients come together to give visible form to said cloud is harder to define. It is a problem of being *singular plural*, of being made up of a combination of factors, and emerging and vanishing as a concrete formation as a result of innumerable ecological factors in a mere matter of moments. In fact, the question could be: when does a cloud begin and where does it end? This is a question concerning the vagueness of the definition of the 'natural' phenomenon of the cloud itself. A problem which has been picked up by metaphysical philosophy as the 'Problem of the Many': even though puffy picture-postcard clouds suggest that clouds have sharp boundaries, the manifestation of a cloud results from the different density accumulations of water droplets – but that density is of a transitional and gradual nature, so that "there is no stark stopping place to be encountered. Rather, anywhere near anything presumed a boundary, there's only a gradual decrease in the density of droplets fit, more or less, to be constituents of a cloud that's there" (Unger 2004, 197) – or, indeed, not there.

This transitory, elusive and ephemeral nature consequently makes it hard to give clouds visible representation. A fact that has not only been exploited by famous poets for their own purposes of alluding to the unattainable, the ungraspable and the unrepresentable, such as Shakespeare, Swift and Wordsworth, but was already remarked upon by amateur painters such as eighteenth-century cleric William Gilpin who observed that everything "faded away" (Gilpin 1798, 130) in front of his eyes while attempting to sketch the splendour of a Somerset evening sky in the 1770s.[1] But while some of this interest in

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[1] In his *Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty*, Gilpin (1798, 129-30) writes that the natural prospect "invited the pencil; but it was a transitory scene. As we stood gazing at it, the sun sunk below the cloud, and being stripped of all its splendour by the haziness of the atmosphere, fell, like a ball of fire, into the horizon". Also: there is not only the famous dialogue between Hamlet and Polonius about the shape of clouds but Shakespeare also used this metaphorical image in his *Antony and Cleopatra* (Scene 14, Act IV), which was echoed by Swift's 1704 *A Tale of a Tub* (Swift 1986, 16): "If I should venture, in a windy day, to affirm to

the difficulty of depicting clouds stems from ideas revolving around the picturesque qualities of unattainable beauty and sublimity,[2] other early art critics, such as John Ruskin, already saw the difficulty of representing clouds in a more profound relationship with representations of ecology at large: Ruskin had joined the London Meteorological Society at the age of 17 and throughout his writings made a point of stressing that "every class of rock, earth, and cloud must be known by the painter, with geologic and meteorologic accuracy" (Ruskin 1844, 16). In Ruskin's time, this mapping and ecological entanglement of clouds was then probably best understood by painters both from the periods of Romanticism and Impressionism, such as J.M.W. Turner and Claude Monet. For these artists did not only see a connection between clouds and ecology but also recognised the increasing effects of technological advancement on their environmental surroundings, as they "painted natural water vapours mixed with smoke produced by the railroad, anticipating the mix of nature and culture that would be so dominant in the twentieth-century cloudscape" (Peters 2015, 258).[3] Monet's excursions to London and his *Waterloo Series* (1900-4) as well as Turner's 1844 *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway* are prominent examples of this. As opposed to the clouds in medieval imagery, which had served as portals to the divine realm, the modern industrial age thus not only saw clouds as "visual indications of something that cannot be depicted" (Hamblyn 2017, 121; Damisch 2002), as something that exceeds representability on the scalar level, but also already as something that illustrates the dissolution of the purely 'natural' sphere.[4]

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your Highness that there is a large cloud near the horizon in the form of a bear, another in the zenith with the head of an ass, a third to the westward with claws like a dragon; and your Highness should in a few minutes think fit to examine the truth, it is certain they would be all changed in figure and position, new ones would arise, and all we could agree upon would be, that clouds there were, but that I was grossly mistaken in the zoography and topography of them".

2   Gilpin himself established the notion of the picturesque scenery in his 1782 practical guide *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770*, which drew heavily on Edmund Burke's concepts of the beautiful and the sublime.

3   Also: German polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as well as English art critic John Ruskin were both enamoured with nephology, the science of cloud formations, and the spiritual qualities of those sky apparitions. The entire host of Romantic poetry and painting followed suit, including Shelley, Constable, Caspar David Friedrich and Barrett Browning, and was "obsessed" with depicting the ephemeral qualities of clouds. For more, see: Hamblyn 2017, 47-60; 109-12; 123-35.

4   Ruskin's perception of "diabolic clouds over everything", which have since been widely interpreted as products of the oppressive industrial smog of the time, have led twentieth century commentators to attribute the title of proto-environmentalist to Ruskin (Hamblyn 2017, 130).

2   Digital Clouds Everywhere

In our times, this ecological entanglement of clouds has gained even more traction, as we swiftly approach the breaking point of ecological crisis and are consequently in need of ever more representations that illustrate the scalar extent of Anthropogenic ecological interferences, with clouds at the forefront of the study of meteorological change. At the same time, this project of planetary ecological mapping has been complicated by another shift in the perception of what a cloud can be – because these days we seem to be constantly surrounded by clouds: Due in large part to the way language has imbued our 'technosphere'[5] with a metaphorical sense derived from descriptions of so-called 'elemental' or 'natural' phenomena, we now do not only consider the material formation of both 'natural' and industrial water particles and vapours but also the interactive digital technosphere as a cloud. Today "we cannot think of the cloud without thinking about data" (Peters 2015, 49). While at the turn of the millennium any internet search query for 'cloud' was dominated by information on weather and climate, now we can find tech giants and their digital services headlining the lists (Hamblyn 2017, 174).

On the one hand, this metaphorical link between Nature and Technology indicates the intricate entanglement and embeddedness of digital technology in our so-called 'natural' surroundings, something the paintings of the industrial age already alluded to. On the other hand, it also represents the *dimensional elusiveness* of the digital technosphere, because just as the poets of old used the cloud as a way to describe that which escapes definition, the cloud has now become a stand-in for seemingly borderless, complex systems and networks that escape our rational grasp: while electrical engineers from the early days of computing used the symbol of the cloud as a shorthand for any as yet undefined complex external connection – "a power system, or a data exchange, or another network of computers" (Bridle 2018, 6) – the cloud in today's digitalized world encompasses literally anything and everything, as the promise of decentralised data storage has become a selling point in its own right and globalization, as a phenomenon driven by capitalist market expansion, is now largely based and dependent on digitally supported connections. We thus use cloud computing for almost anything, from private data storage, resource pooling and virtual networks to entrepreneurial big data management and increased computing power

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5   The term technosphere represents "the interlinked set of communication, transportation, bureaucratic and other systems that act to metabolize fossil fuels and other energy resources", and which is "considered to be an emerging global paradigm, with similarities to the lithosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere and biosphere" (Haff 2014, 301).

and scalability. And as a result, the material manifestations of our computational age can also be found all around us. Because, despite its ethereal, ephemeral, numinous and opaque nature, the cloud of the internet is also rooted in the material world and relies on a firm physical infrastructure that requires attention and care. A metastasizing infrastructure that criss-crosses international jurisdiction and power relations in the form of computer servers, data centres, wireless frequencies and submarine communication cables, touching on issues such as national security, data privacy, taxation and the environment.[6] In a critique of this capitalist colonisation, one could say that the idea of "empire has mostly rescinded territory, only to continue its operation at the level of infrastructure, maintaining its power in the form of the network" (Bridle 2018, 247).

Digital globalization, this new geography of distribution, has thus imbued our environments with artificial devices to such an extent, that screens, frequencies and cables now create an invisible system of background entities and the infrastructural basis to our lives. The resulting global digitalization has reached enormous dimensional magnitudes and scales. In the words of eminent computer scientist Joseph Weizenbaum, the complexity of today's digital web of telecommunication and information systems has "surpassed the understanding of their users and become indispensable to them" at the same time (Weizenbaum 1976, 236).

3 Cloudy Thinking, or: Staying with the Trouble of Unrepresentability

It must be obvious then that any ecological mapping is being further complicated by the idea that clouds are now everywhere and anywhere, that clouds, whose visible manifestations were previously at best hard to define, have now even become invisible to the naked eye and that territory is not a category to rely upon anymore. How can we then map the latest Anthropogenic interferences: the digital planetary interventions? How can we make visible that which is not bound anymore to a concept of locality? How can we relate the *dimensional elusiveness* and *ecological entanglement* of the digital technosphere to a greater public?

Some hints can be found in the arguments brought forward by Object-oriented Ontology, especially by Timothy Morton's concept of hyperobjects: the digital technosphere like "the dimension and effects of climate change cannot be grasped, or accessed, all at once in its entirety" (Morton 2021, 10) – so we might need to acknowledge that

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6 For more on this, see also Hu 2016.
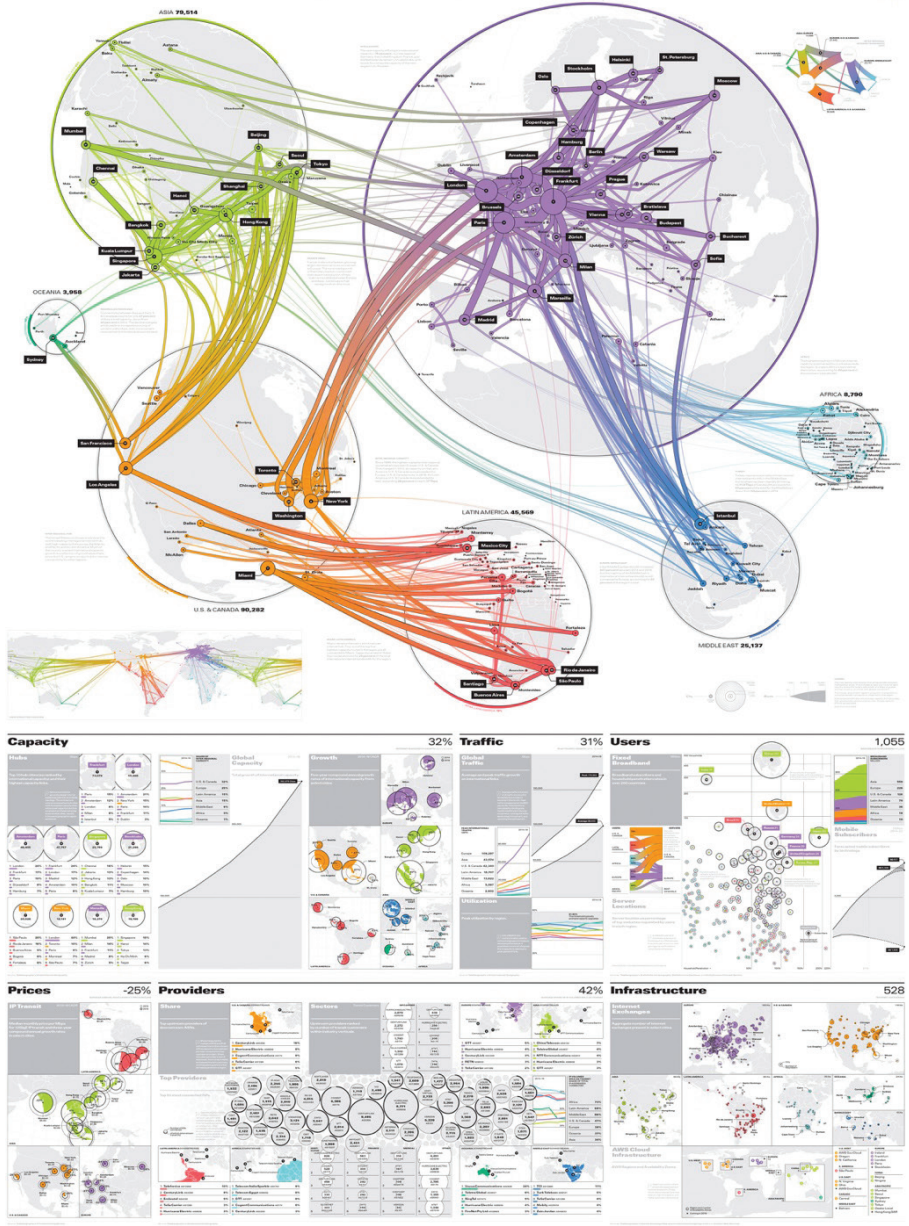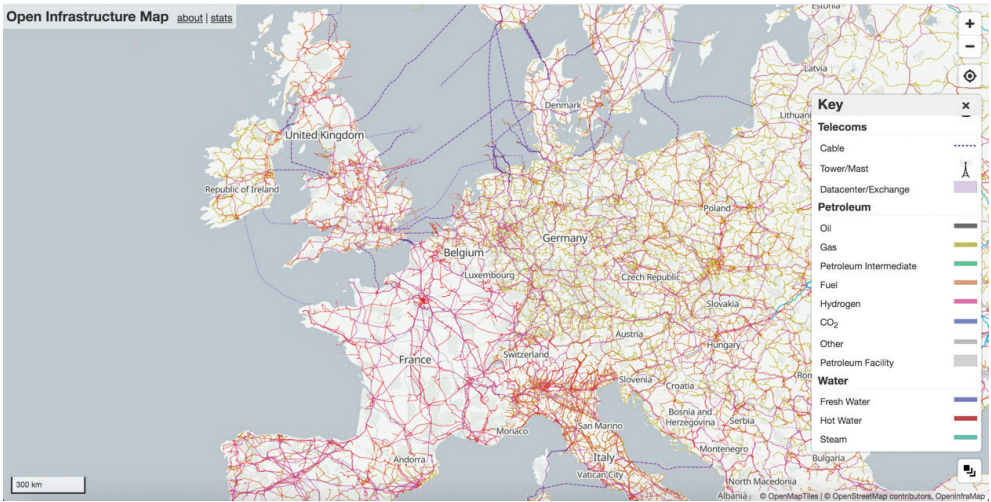
traditional rational access modes will not suffice in comprehending these issues. Because these access modes have only succeeded insofar as they have spoken to the digital technosphere's dimension in terms of statistical estimates and to its ecological embeddedness in terms of individual material manifestations. This reduction of the network to its output sources, however, sidesteps the dynamic spatial diffusion of the digital cloud and any navigational desire by the human user.

While industry-sponsored telegeographical maps might therefore detail such aspects as bandwidth traffic, the number of international submarine cables and average technological penetration rate per capita **[fig. 1]**, they only engage in a practice of oversimplification, or, to put it in the terminology of Object-oriented Ontology, in a practice of 'overmining': "Overmining is when one reduces a thing 'upward' into an effect of some supervenient system" (Morton 2013a, 155). In fact, by attributing only certain effects, they isolate all other aspects. Digital telecommunication thus gets separated from other industrial production pathways or resource transportation cycles, such as oil or water, in order to make an easy reading possible **[fig. 2]**. However, as we are only to aware these days, global digitalization is not limited to private telecommunication practices, since "the practice of medicine is increasingly a branch of informatics. The forestry industry is a data business" (Peters 2015, 4).

Meanwhile, the other far end of the traditional spectrum features meticulous surveys of individual local materialization of the global

digital network, such as detailed 3D renderings of publicly inaccessible major data centres – as can be seen in John Gerrard's artistic renderings *FARM (COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA) 2015* and his earlier rendition *FARM (PRYOR CREEK, OKLAHOMA) 2015* [fig. 3]. This approach is based on the assumption that a single materialization might channel the vast, complex and elusive nature of the digital technosphere and bind it within one object – and thus portray it as more real. However, Object-oriented Ontology demonstrates that this reduction is just another instance of 'undermining': "Undermining is when things are reduced to smaller things that are held to be more real" (Morton 2013a, 156).

Both approaches therefore cannot speak to the direct environmental embeddedness, they only reduce a thing downward to its

components, or reduce it upward to its effects. They only create an abstract, distanced vision of something "over yonder" (Morton 2013a, 155) by clinging to the idea of a border-specific territory or the suggestive power of numeric values. But these are both two-dimensional cartographies that are either too big or too small to portray the magnitude as well as the three-dimensional embeddedness of the digital technosphere. They neither account for the 'non-locality' nor for the adherent 'viscousness' (Morton 2013a, 1) of the digital signals that penetrate our world. They might give an idea of the estimated scope or individual shape of incremental parts, but they do not – as maps are supposed to – help us navigate the cloudy, three-dimensional digital environment, because their reductionism fails to illustrate how the invisible digital cloud disseminates across space, and how that dissemination is subject to complex and sometimes unaccountable environmental factors. To refer back to the 'Problem of the Many': Both approaches only concern themselves with the composition of individual droplets, as in the material manifestation of individual nodes in the global network, or focus on the number of droplets that underlie the formation of a cloud, as in the statistical estimation of telecommunication traffic. But neither accounts for the moment of taking shape of the cloud, for its *gestalt* in a three-dimensional environment – because neither makes visible the invisible density level of the digital cloud.

What is needed then is a new view that does not reduce to individual aspects or dissolve the ever-changing flux of material manifestations by means of vague numeric estimates. Especially as public reception to oppressing amounts of data mapping the increasing ecological crises on planet Earth is still at best lukewarm, it might need other forms of representation that do not adhere to strict statistical enquiry and scientific observation. In fact, the unimaginable scale, individual powerlessness and complex interrelationships of climate change seem to be resistant to persuasive public mass media representation – which might explain humankind's failure to counter the alarming trends (Ghosh 2016). It will thus need a strategy that is situated between the far ends of scientific enquiry, which are only oriented towards scales of organisation that reside at the extremes, such as the infinite or the infinitesimal. It will need a representational strategy that helps us think and feel at an inter-dimensional scale, one that stays with the trouble of vagueness and helps us gain a systemic literacy based on 'cloudy thinking': a practice that acknowledges what is dimensional elusive and seeks "new ways of seeing by another light" (Bridle 2018, 11).[7]

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[7] Bridle actually intends the *New Dark Age* of the book's title to be read as an opportunity, not a lament. To embrace this opportunity, he argues, we have to give up

Recalling earlier allusions to the way painters of the Romantic and Impressionist era handled the encroachment of man-made clouds, all of this, of course, points to the aesthetic realm. Because the digital technosphere's magnitude, domination and entanglement with other lifeforms has made it unrepresentable, uncontrollable and yet always present, it has become the withdrawn and irreducible object of Object-oriented Ontology. To put its elements in the rhetorical register of Object-oriented Ontology: they are always a surplus unmastered by all our efforts to grasp their properties.[8] Access to it can thus be given in one region: the aesthetic dimension (Morton 2013b, 18). Because in that dimension, there have since emerged artists who have become aware that in order to map something invisible that constantly surrounds one requires a thinking that draws both from previous representational strategies, which create an accessible frame for the audience, but also from innovative practices, which find new ways of letting the individually uncontrollable technosphere depict itself as a quasi-autonomous force of planetary magnitude. These artists represent the new hybrid of the digital cloud age: They are "a fusion of artist, programmer, and complexity theorist" (Johnson 2003, 177). And their technology-driven artworks make us aware of the omnipresent dimensionality of the digital technosphere and show us how digital technology itself has ceased being simply a bridge between the human and the Other and has instead itself become a configuration of the Other that we are equally part of ourselves, namely, the 'dark' Anthropogenic dimension of ecology.[9]

Focusing on one exemplary artistic position, this article will thus make clear that by drawing on previous artistic techniques of the Romantic and Impressionist period, the artistic realm has managed to open up the existing visible and sensible world to other layers of perception, giving a glimpse of the sublime spatio-temporal magnitudes and scales of the digital more-than-human realm since it has become an integrative part of the so-called 'natural' environment.

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pretensions about perfect knowledge in order to develop new modes of access distinct from the predominant functionalism of "computational thinking" (Bridle 2018).

[8]   Object-oriented ontologist Graham Harman (2019, 18) states that "Heidegger is certainly right that our scientific objectification of a fish or flower fails to exhaust the full depths of these things. Perceiving something directly with the mind does not mean capturing the whole of its reality: no sum total of views of a mountain, for instance, can ever replace the existence of that mountain, any more than the set of all organic chemicals exhausts the existence of their key ingredient, carbon. [...] In Heideggerese, we could say that the being of the chemical or mountain are not commensurate with any knowledge or perception of them; the mountain is always a surplus unmastered by all our efforts to grasp its properties".

[9]   Timothy Morton (2018) speaks of 'Dark Ecology' in order to include all Anthropogenic meddling in our definition of ecology.

4   Romantic Landscape Painting Revisited

In the eighteenth century, renowned cloud painter John Constable already asked the public to consider landscape painting "a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but the experiments" (Thornes 1999, 51). Similarly, Dutch artist and designer Richard Vijgen asks us today to consider his digitally enhanced interpretation of landscape painting as an ecological technique capable of mapping the embeddedness of the digital technosphere in our 'natural' surroundings. By means of real-time data processing, his 2019 art installation *WiFi Impressionist* **[fig. 3]** "draws electromagnetic landscapes inspired by the cityscapes of William Turner" (Vijgen 2019). Using a directional antenna on a pan-tilt mechanism that monitors local Wi-Fi signals and builds a three-dimensional model of those signals, a viewport and mobile plotter visualise these signals and draw a picture remindful of the *House of Parliament Series* of Impressionist painter Claude Monet. And, indeed, Vijgen himself makes the connection to the tradition of landscape painting:

> Pretty much like a painter would sit down in a field with a canvas on an easel and paint a representation of the view. I took this analogy literally because I felt it was helpful in achieving my goal of imagining WiFi as a landscape of radio signals. Just like visible light, radio is a part of the electromagnetic spectrum. And just like a painting of a landscape is an interpretation of the electromagnetic vibrations (colour), so too is radio, albeit in a different range of the spectrum. (Vijgen 2020, 14-15)

Vijgen thus uses "code, space and pixels to visualise the invisible" (Pittaway 2019). But his artistic mapping of the surrounding ecology is not concerned with showing and listing everything there is to find in the sense of scientific representation. Rather *WiFi Impressionist*'s visual renderings are more "a way of understanding" (Pittaway 2019). Or, in the register of Anna Tsing, Vijgen's attempt at mapping the invisible ecology of the digital technosphere is a way of "thinking with the landscapes" (Tsing 2020, 21), which opens analysis to the invisible multiplicity of the digital technosphere. He thus engages with the idea of the cloud on the level of the metaphorical motif of a complex network rather than the scientific study of visible territorial and local manifestations. *WiFi Impressionist* thus directly engages with the traditional interpretative practice of landscape painting, as it does not depict what is evident but creates a vision of the invisible becoming visible. Because "landscape painting does not depict what we see, i.e., what we notice when looking at a place, but – the paradox is unavoidable – it makes visible the invisible, although it be something far removed" (Straus 1963, 322).

This slight distortion of the primacy of the visible territory is very much the domain of the artistic realm, as art's purpose is defamiliarization, or 'estrangement', as the early twentieth-century literary critic Viktor Shklovsky called it. Using the period technique of landscape painting as a playground or foundation, Vijgen's spectator can see more clearly the dimensional elusiveness and intricate embeddedness of the digital technosphere in the so-called 'natural' surroundings. Yet, Vijgen's appropriation of the landscape painting does not submit to any romantic escape velocity:

> The classic image of Nature is the Romantic or picturesque painting of a landscape. There it is, over yonder – on the wall in the gallery. And it has over-yonder-ness encoded throughout it: look at those distant hills, that branch suggesting that we follow the perspective lines toward the vanishing point, and so on. (Morton 2013a, 72-3)

Whereas the landscape paintings of the Romantic and even Impressionist period allowed the idealized beholder to flee and find refuge from an increasingly demanding and challenging environment that was already infused with technological advancement, Vijgen's traditionalist landscape enframing of the presently operating digital technosphere turns into an act of constant revelation. The beholder is not a "Romantic consumer" (Campbell 1987) but a web user caught in present abstinence: not presently contributing to the digital technosphere in its local Wi-Fi manifestations but engaged in awareness-building appreciation of their own overall implication as a driver of digital expansion. And therein lies a sense of melodramatic and dark pleasure, because the spectator sees the becoming of a representation they could and others are actively creating through their use of the local Wi-Fi networks: "Ecological awareness is dark, insofar as its essence is unspeakable. It is dark, insofar as illumination leads to a greater sense of entrapment" (Morton 2018, 110). This mapping of the Wi-Fi activity therefore also exits the purely two-dimensional sphere of the canvas and engulfs the spectator. And for this reason it also needs not open so far as to require everything to enter the analysis, because effectively Vijgen's installational setup portrays "data interpretations" (Pittaway 2019) as opposed to data visualisations: "The point is not to see the world 'as it is' (whatever that means), but to be faced with the world that we regularly look past" (Bogost 2016, 234-5). The point is to see that part of the world which is hidden to us due to our own complicity in its creation.

5   Renaissance Mural Painting Revisited

In the context of Manifesta 12 in Palermo in 2018, Vijgen also made use of another traditional painting technique: *di sotto in su* (paintings seen from below). At the Palazzo Ajutamicristo, his installation *Connected by Air* **[fig. 4]** projected a live animated graphic feed of all discernible airborne substances passing over the city onto the Renaissance palace's ceiling. Inspired by the highly realistic *quadratura* perspective, which seemingly extends the architectural space, *Connected by Air* thus created a window that provides "a comprehensive overview of all the data and objects that fill the sky. It includes wireless signals (2G, 3G, 4G coverage), satellites, air traffic (flight patterns), air conditions (particles, dust), and air flow (wind patterns)" (Vijgen 2018).

But the transposition of the *quadratura* and the *sotto in su* techniques not only create the illusion of the opening up of the palazzo's ceiling, it once again also engulfs the spectator. As Frieze art critic Evan Moffitt (Moffitt 2018) writes about the effect of Vijgen's installation in his review of the art festival: "The graphic is unsettling: even on the clearest day, we always breathe in something we wish we hadn't, and there is always somebody watching us". Pre-digital painting analysis, such as Gilles Deleuze's theoretical writings on the art of Francis Bacon, might suggest that "as a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed" (Deleuze 2003, 31). However, this 'living' digital painting reverses the path of sensation. It rather infiltrates and takes over the space as the spectator realizes the embeddedness of their own position in this dome of radio waves, ozone layers and flight paths (again it also "visualises the wireless activity caused by visitor's devices as they try to connect to the cloud", Vijgen 2018). Instead of seeing the landscape embellished with a sky that is infinite, the spectator is confronted with something that finitely surrounds them:

> Habit tells us that what's displayed on that screen (like projections in a planetarium) is infinite, distant – the whole Kantian sublime. But inside the belly of the whale that is global warming, it's oppressive and hot and there's no 'away' anymore. (Morton 2013a, 132)

The art installation therefore does not map or open up the inner dimension of Hegelian spirits or a Kantian sublime, but it wakes the spectator up to the fact that we are "inside of a gigantic object, like finding ourselves in the womb again, but a toxic womb – but we are responsible for it" (Morton 2013a, 183).

Vijgen's appropriation and reinterpretation of traditional painting techniques is thus more akin to process philosophy in that it helps us

see the high-dimensional digital technosphere by using the algorithmic techniques of plotting and mapping. In fact, Vijgen's artistic concept is one that finally allows the data and digital processing to take over as the parameter-controlling digital set-ups only create the image according to the input of the autonomous agency of the surrounding digital signals: once installed, the artist hands control to the digital 'easel and painter' set-ups, and all that will consequently reveal itself aesthetically on the canvas or the ceiling is left to the activity of the incoming data, which cannot be manipulated by any one individual. The playful interpretation of Romantic landscape and Renaissance mural painting by Vijgen is thus less a reflection about the portrayed landscape but an expression of the autonomous agency and elemental dimension of the surrounding digital signals themselves. As John Black (2002, 136) attests, a Romanticist approach in art can "probe the dark places between subject and object". In the case of Vijgen's appropriation of the Romantic landscape as well as the Renaissance

mural painting, the spectator is consequently shown "a contemporary sky's image as a carrier of people, matter and information" (Vijgen 2018). This image of human and nonhuman activities is thus both ecologically meaningful and constructed by a more-than-human agency.

6 Reconnaissance

As Richard Vijgen's artistic renderings of the digital technopshere show, appropriation of previous artistic techniques allows a greater public

> to spend time with things, to visit with them, to give them a chance to be exactly what they are, […] that we become continuously blind to them, that we exercise the ability to see them fresh, familiar or not, by refusing to allow them to collapse into servants or obstacles. (Bogost 2016, 351)

Rather than reducing complexity, the metaphorical link between the 'natural' and 'digital' as represented by the cloud and its accompanying reinterpretation of Romantic and Impressionist techniques make the unrepresentable dimension of Anthropogenic interferences more accessible.[10] The landscape motifs created by Vijgen's installations show us the dimension, forces and connections of the contemporary digital technosphere by unleashing them from an unrestrained two-dimensional space onto our three-dimensional spatial awareness. They thus relate the content of ecological issues and relationships to the beholder by way of making use of previous aesthetic practices while also not reducing these digital technologies to singular material manifestions, uses, functions or effects. To quote Timothy Morton once more: "One glimpses in radical environmental art the possibility of a radical openness to other beings, without goal" (Morton 2007, 164). Vijgen's art installations can therefore be regarded as *Bewusstseinsapparate*, as aesthetic 'thinkfeel' devices cloaked as maps to the digital technosphere: their technology-driven renderings make us aware of the omnipresent dimensionality of the digital technosphere and how digital technology itself has ceased being simply a bridge between the human and the Other and has instead itself become a configuration of the Other that we are equally part of ourselves, namely, the 'dark' Anthropogenic dimension of ecology.

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10 It is also rather telling that Friedrich Kittler praised the artists of the Renaissance as 'great' because he deemed them engineers (Peters 2015, 26). This links back to today's commentary that artists like Richard Vijgen are complexity theorists and programmers.

On the basis of Mark Johnson and George Lakoff's work on the importance of metaphors in our perception and construction of the world (Lakoff, Johnson 1980), we can therefore acknowledge that the "meteorological mystique" (Hamblyn 2017, 174) of the cloud metaphor, which already signals an elusiveness and ephemerality in the 'natural' world, can consequently enable us to cope with the sense of incomprehensibility we feel in the face of the abstract global and interconnected local dimensions the digital cloud now traverses. As Mark Johnson (1987, 126; cf. Croyne 1995, 288) elaborates, "metaphorical projection is one fundamental means by which we project structure, make new connections, and remould our experience": it is "our mode of being-in-the-world or our way of having-a-world". It is therefore no surprise, that our fascination for clouds has been rekindled in today's digital world. Just as around eighteen and nineteenth centuries, the Romantics and the Moderns were fascinated by "the changing, the

indefinite, the distant and the unattainable" (Badt 1950, 4), in the twenty-first century the metaphorical worldmaking connected to the cloud has also come to represent "the new leaning towards anything vague, unclear and unbinding" (Kunz et al. 2005, 8). Because "rather than evoking technocratic control, the Cloud evokes the weather. In naming it, we seek not mastery but accommodation with forces greater than ourselves" (Bridle 2023, 159). The metaphor of the cloud can consequently be said to be a way of familiarising oneself with the *dimensional elusiveness* and *ecological entanglement* of today's digital technosphere.

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