

1. Safe return doubtful.

No matter how often we may have heard these words before, even after a thousand repetitions their evocative power still lingers in our minds, interminably stirring our sense of wonder: “Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success”. This was Ernest Shackleton’s recruitment notice asking for volunteers for the Endurance expedition to Antarctica in 1914. Its language vividly encapsulates everything we may ever wish from journeys of/or exploration: an experience that- even beyond the bounds of geography or physical constraints- activates in us the longing for a challenge at once deeply intimate and shared; a concept of discovery that means questioning our own home port, rather than simply arriving at new destinations. In *12 Metres of Landscape*, Enrique Radigales invites us to set out on a journey that seems at first - by virtue of its sense of proximity and its apparent safety- far removed from Shackleton’s advertisement, and yet nevertheless matches its requirements almost to the letter: a crossing through uncharted territories, ordinary yet also uncanny; a passage that upon completion (if such a thing is ever possible) lands the travellers back in a site that has become unknown, and is much more thrilling and terrifying than their point of departure; a route connecting Radigales’ itinerary with each of his viewers.

In twelve metres of Hahnemühle paper printed in pigmented ink, and covered in acrylic paint, an orography is outlined whose contours evoke a mountain ridge formed by the multitude of seemingly random online images you get when you google the search term “landscape”: 17th Century Dutch paintings; cartographies of (or from) the past, the present, or even the future; clichéd depictions of global tourism; topographies; Renaissance vistas and paintings; pixel-shaped fragments at different resolutions; mountains, lakes, rivers, waterfalls and other natural phenomena; contemporary architectures; woods and meadows; maps of the atmosphere; plus an assortment of photographs one would hardly ever place or recognize under the category of “landscape” at all. At the website (HTML project) onto which Radigales’ piece is further extended, one may scroll through different images (download speeds varying according to the available bandwidth), all of which are arranged into compositions limited to 256 colours, the simplest digital palette in any operating system. To a certain extent Radigales had already experimented with this technique in his *Arcade* (2011), where different arcade games are mapped onto a mixed composition, and even more directly in his *Gif Manifesto* (2010), where the whole range of HTML colours is physically laid out throughout the artist’s study, thereby generating a sort of personal tour through his workplace that is further amplified- on a higher level- into a two-way journey from physical spaces to (or as seen from) digital media and back. A sort of remake of Xavier de Maistre’s *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (1794), the story of an officer’s imprisonment in his own room during forty days of house arrest, recounted in the style of travel literature to the effect that, under the adventurous disposition of the narrator’s gaze, even the most ordinary and familiar objects (the furniture, the lamps, the books, the walls) become props in scenes from a thrilling voyage through strange lands. Adventure- we learn- was in the eye of the beholder.

2. Summertime Clothes.

If De Maistre’s parodic take on travel literature revealed the truth about most of the adventures in all such narratives at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th (namely, how they framed the Enlightenment’s quest for knowledge in terms of the modern subject’s [colonial] gaze, pandering to the expectations of [European] settlers and colonists), Radigales’ *Gif Manifesto* and *12 Metres of Landscape* likewise lay bare the limitations of a seemingly inexhaustible environment. Digital media promise to grant us

access to a boundless world of visual possibilities, but in the end what they deliver turns out to be quite poor in one of its basic aspects: the handling of colour. For all those vast digitized landscapes lying just a mouse-click away from us are actually downsized into rather visually limited pictures in 256 colours with a resolution of 72 dpi. And yet those images have a huge impact on the construction of our gaze; they shape our perception of our most immediate physical surroundings by fixing the shades and hues that we believe to be most chromatically correct, or “natural”: this or that type of blue for the sky, this or that type of green for that particular tree, etc etc. Radigales had already explored this framing of perception in his *Folha* (2009), where source code is die-cut onto *Philodendron* leaves, highlighting a sort of suturing of the discrepancy between the images we see, and how we see them. The fact is that sometimes it’s remarkable how quite unlike their photographs real objects actually are, how unreal they look- especially landscapes: when we see them live, in nature, we often end up finding them more artificial (and disappointing) than their photographic renditions.

What Radigales’ *12 Metres of Landscape*- like his other projects before- attempts to unveil is the elusive framework of visual experience, which is always taken for granted and seldom examined, thereby remaining paradoxically invisible in its implicitness. Radigales illuminates the structuring of visuality by rendering visible the gap between what is seen and what intuition senses. The project, furthermore, also tells each viewer’s story, as the image archive changes after each visit in accordance with the user’s search history. Scales and resolutions along the twelve metres of landscape are thus constantly being altered, and photographs may be upscaled or downscaled regardless of the actual size of the objects they depict. The alleged neutrality of digital media is somehow disturbed, “tainted” by each choice, each search.

Radigales had already attempted something on this line in his *Big Yellow* (2011), an installation consisting of an oversized (8,5 by 5,5 metres) yellow pixel located in the exhibition space at the *Matadero Contemporary Art Centre* in Madrid, and further extended into a sort of colonization of the institution’s own website, in the form of a set of pixels that changed size as one clicked on them, with information being given on their hue and saturation as well as on data programming. Once again digital and live experiences run side by side and then part and then recombine into a thrilling tour across different sizes and scales. The everyday becomes a wondrous experience, as in the song *Summertime Clothes* (2009) by psychedelic band *Animal Collective*, where a texture of sounds and intertwined rhythms describe the sliding of daily experience into otherness: “My bed is a pool/ and the walls are on fire”. You don’t need to travel far to find the exotic and the extraordinary.

3. Enslaved by the appliances in the Zone.

Much has been written on how our daily lives are made easier (or at least tidier) by all kinds of technologies; it is perhaps time then to reflect on how gadgets also complicate our existence. Historical analyses tend to focus on the relative emancipation of everyday life allowed by the liberation from domestic toil resulting from the massive expansion of home appliances after the Second World War. It must also be noted, however, that by reconfiguring people’s habits and customs, household machines brought about new burdens and limitations. Chores that used to be carried out collectively once a week- such as clothes-washing or whole-house cleaning- became a rather demanding daily ritual conducted by single individuals. For those subjects almost always in charge of nearly all cleaning tasks- i.e. women-, this meant that thanks to vacuum-cleaners, washing machines and dishwashers, the work they had formerly carried out periodically and in groups was now confined to a daily, solitary routine, disconnected from public, communal life- and that dimension was now limited or lost. This somewhat extreme example is not altogether dissimilar from the limitations and reconfigurations imposed upon us by technology as revealed in Radigales’ works, where perception is reshaped and conditioned by allegedly neutral, limit-free devices.

Shifting the terms of debate away from technicalities or technological analysis, Radigales renders visible the boundary and the tensions between conflicting virtual and physical domains in works such as *Domestic Grafts* (2008), where he neutralizes the distinction between the real and the virtual with a baffling superimposition of images that our perceptual abilities- confused and disoriented- can’t quite grasp. Blurring the borders between different realms, Radigales becomes an explorer of visuality in the style of the protagonist of *Andrei*

Tarkovski's *Stalker* (1979). The eponymous hero in the film crosses through a strange haze into the outlandish territory known as the "Zone", a forbidden area where impossible things happen and secret wishes are granted. The Zone seems harmless and quite ordinary at first, not much different from any other place- and yet nothing in it or about it is normal. Tarkovski himself explains it in the following terms: "I have often been asked what the Zone represents. There is only one answer: the Zone doesn't exist. It's Stalker himself who invented his Zone. He created it in order to take some very unhappy people there, and to impose on them the idea of hope. The chamber of desires is also a Stalker creation, one more provocation in the face of the material world. This provocation, constructed in Stalker's spirit, corresponds to an act of faith". An act- we may add- that does not entail severing the plane of desires from the plane of reality into separate worlds, but reshuffling both to show neither actually exists. In other words: it's how we approach them and define them that makes them interesting and transforms them, by setting boundaries, allowing us to find our bearings through the exhilaration of the journey. Images and their medium, which in our visual perception seem to be two different things, cannot actually be separated. What structures them is our way of seeing.

4. Space-time devices.

As we see in *12 Metres of Landscape*, an extraordinary journey doesn't need to involve a physical displacement from nearby locations to distant ones: it suffices to turn the act and the means of travelling- whatever they are- into powerful space-time devices. We don't need to transport ourselves over long distances. In his *The Explorer's Route* (2011), Radigales shows us how we can discover a whole cosmos by simply following the path of the files opened in a computer. In the series *Disappearances* (begun in 2011), he mobilizes the power of personal fictions by gathering paintings, artefacts and films with contents missing or even no longer in existence- such as the data from the Viking Mars probes (1976), the original negative of the film *Lost Horizon* (1937), or Carl Blechen's painting "The Lightning" (1831)-, all of which are nevertheless still capable of triggering evocative afterimages of their trajectories and their final destinations. The uncertain fortunes that befell all such objects are, after all, not very different from the future that awaits many technologies which- however useful we may find them today- are bound to become obsolete in a very short time: useless cables and plugs (Haze, 2011), disused floppy discs (RIP, RIP, Hurray!, 2010); ancient programming code (*Photographed code*, 2005); glitches in computer monitors from the 1990s (*Glitch*, 2008)... These works not only exemplify Radigales' interest in outdated lo-fi tech, but also bear witness to the power of discontinuity in history. History cannot be conceived as a diachronic sequence, but must be rethought in terms of fragmentation. As scientist Miguel Ángel Hernández Navarro argues, even in biology, which used to be the most linear of the sciences, sequential continuity has been superseded by a vision that emphasises randomness, gaps, leaps and unbalance in natural processes- and a similar approach may be applicable in other fields such as history. As Reinhart Koselleck claims, we must view past history as stratified layers of time (*Zeitschichten*) to be studied simultaneously from our vantage point as present observers, like archaeologists always missing a part of the puzzle.

5. Lost tracks, extraordinary voyages.

With the vanishing of certain technologies, whether lost or replaced by others, it's not only artefacts that disappear, but a whole way of using them and the lived experience connected with that use. As Hannah Arendt explains in *Between Past and Future*: "... the treasure was lost not because of historical circumstances and the adversity of reality but because no tradition had foreseen its appearance or its reality, because no testament had willed it for the future. The loss, at any rate, perhaps inevitable [...], was consummated by oblivion, by a failure of memory, which befell not only the heirs but, as it were, the actors, the witnesses, those who for a fleeting moment had held the treasure in the palms of their hands, in short, the living themselves. For remembrance, which is only one, though one of the most important, modes of thought, is helpless outside a pre-established framework of reference, and the human mind is only on the rarest occasions capable of retaining something which is altogether unconnected. Thus the first who failed to remember what the treasure was like were precisely those who had possessed it and found it so strange that they did not even know how to name it. At the

time this did not bother them [...] The point of the matter is that the ‘completion’, which indeed every enacted event must have in the minds of those who then are to tell the story and to convey its meaning, eluded them; and without this thinking completion after the act, without the articulation accomplished by remembrance, there simply was no story left that could be told”.

Throughout his works and most specifically in *12 Metres of Landscape*, Enrique Radigales takes us on a journey that recovers the legibility of different views on the connection between media and the mechanisms of perception. The itinerary leads us through physical spaces and the images we have of them, along the scales and resolution of said images, the apparatuses that allow us to see them, their chronological location, the users’ stories, the legacies that may be lost, the vantage point from which we look. It’s a strange voyage, reminiscent of Kit’s and Holly’s in Terrence Malik’s *Badlands* (1973), where two teen-agers elope across the USA in search of a lost natural paradise that only existed in Western films or Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novels. A place one can never find, for it lacks physical existence: it lies only in that borderland between reality and desire that the experience of the voyage itself creates.

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