

Diaspora and Displacement: Datamapping in a Cinematic Frame.
Seeker by Josephine Starrs & Leon Cmielewski

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Al Gore it isn't, Chaplinesque in his climbing a ladder to reach the upward ascent of the angry-red squiggle of his climate change graph in *An Inconvenient Truth*. Cmielewski and Starrs have adopted another strategy in *Seeker*, an equally politically intensive work, making data mapping sexy through their use of an immersive, affective cinematic style. Compared to Gore's clumsy and somewhat endearing persona, and the splicing of his serious but deadly dull pedagogy with cute animations, Cmielewski and Starrs hit the mark through large-scale multi-screened cinematic impact.

The viewer is literally swept up and into a multitude of planes; in Deleuzian terms, into a combinatorial of perception and affection-image, cognitively engaged with simply figuring out what it is that is being perceived on the different screens, at the same time as emotionally sunk into the more rapturous appeal of vast depopulated landscapes - stretches of vari-coloured sands and clear blue skies scrolling across the more dominant screen of first impressions. It could be *Lawrence of Arabia* except for a determined absence. Rather, like Antonioni, Cmielewski and Starrs exploit the empty landscape for emotional tone, charged with a certain sense of loss and alienation. You can't help but ask where are the people? This is contrasted with an equally grand screen, on the opposite wing of this three-part installation, on which the satellite panning of *Google earth* is blown up large over a collage of cities, cities which Starrs describes as "places people are trying to escape from or get to." In between these two wing-like screens, folding you in, the central screen invites active participation in data mapping.

However, details on the first two screens are too disturbing to immediately proceed. Across the panning over the cities of *Google Earth* teletexting delivers a roll-call of anonymous deaths gleaned from the news: so many found dead after a boat capsized en route to Spain or to Italy, a litany of drownings; further misadventures of groups found suffocated in the backs of lorries in Europe's

cross-border trade. The combination of involuntary affect, of being emotionally caught in the trap of the affective image screen, and this information of loss is distracting, if not deeply disturbing. Television, or even the web as an information source, is not usually received in affective cinematic mode. Deleuze's point, in *Cinema 1*, is that certain image types (the affection-image series) have the power to induce particular emotional responses.

Seeker is thus not another big screen data projected event hyped as immersive. Affect without a content is easily sloughed off like the thrill of anything that big up close, but combine affect with a message worthy of deeper reflective thought and the mix is potent, especially when a further layer of content shifts you back from the particular (each of those anonymous deaths at that time is particular) to general rules of economy under globalisation.

Overlaid on the desertscapes a white horizon thread acts as a baseline for comparing data sets. In discreet semicircles of contrasting size GNP per capita of a country is diagrammed against the proportion of refugees accepted; another data set charts civilian deaths in third world wars against the diamonds or oil which pay for them. Third world mineral wealth reads like a curse. Displacements of people, commodities, deaths and strife behave like so many unwelcome abstract laws. Countries with low immigrant populations read as more open to refugees; surprisingly, on a per capita basis conservative Austria outstrips Norway in acceptance of the other.

However, look again, and those big, depeopled skies riding against the data sets are also part John Ford western. For big sky and big land *should* call forth a people. In Deleuze's analysis of the John Ford western his big skies and broad horizons usually signaled combat, a people, a hero and an ethics. The John Ford western was inherently moral, signaling values "at stake" (vanquishing bad folks - the outlaws or Indians pre the reappraisal of postcolonial debates). The point of an ethics still inherently stands as raised. What do Starrs & Cmielewski data sets sum up than the fate, the destinies, of peoples? The implicit reference back to the John Ford western, or *Lawrence of Arabia*, unconsciously absorbed in our collective memory banks, is still reflective of the battles of any number of peoples, the Arabs, the Indians, the dispossessed anywhere.

Poignantly, the desertscapes selected were, Ozymadias-like, once seats of power or cradles of the beginnings of civilisation like Australia's Lake Mungo, the oldest on earth. The question of peoples, power shifts, war and diasporas is posed against economic rises and falls. A philosophic register of destinies thus resounds within the epic imagery, updated with the global satellite technology through which war and goods are now fought and tracked (as are the lines of flight of refugees by coastguards).

The central screen, the interactive, symbolically places the user at the heart of the conflicts, caught in the cross-flows of economic and war-induced diaspora. Punch in where you, your parents and their parents were born and watch the trajectories of your own family history unfold on the map of the world. You, the user, are also a mapper and mapped, inside and within the world as event.

Seeker, like Al Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth*, or *Babel*, or *Syriana*, or *Blood Diamonds*, shares common concerns: economics, globalisation and dispossession. Politically searching in its pedagogic aims, *Seeker* puts you, and your history, into current trajectories. It places the user in the role of title, a seeker of insight, of hope, of a safe place for others, of political solutions.

Seeker Josephine Starrs & Leon Cmielewski
Artspace, Sydney February 16 - March 10 2007