

DISASTER AND KISMET. LANDSCAPES IN THE FILMS OF WIM CATRYSSE

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"The future is but the obsolete in reverse".
Lance, Vladimir Nabokov, 1952.

THE DESERT

The film [MSR \(2012\)](#) by the artist Wim Catrysse starts with a nearly abstract view of a desert plain. A vast ochre field and a hazy grey sky are faintly divided by a shimmering, yellowish horizon. This opening scene is coloured by a temperate yet insistent sound, and it remains uncertain whether it stems from the rustling wind, industrial activity or distant traffic. After roughly 30 seconds a tank wagon arrives from the right, neatly following the horizon towards the left. Then two trucks appear one after the other, entering on the left and leaving the image on the right. As soon as the third truck vanishes, the perspective imperceptibly changes. The road no longer stretches out along the horizon, but splits the image diagonally from the middle left side towards the centre, where it dissolves into the horizon. Once more a truck emerges, now driving towards the camera. When the vehicle has left the scene, the camera jumps, as it were, on the latter's back. It steadily follows the desert road and the power pylons that in their turn run parallel to the horizon. Nothing changes much in the depicted landscape; we witness a linear succession of scattered detritus and miscellaneous objects of infrastructure. Since a sand-coloured mist veils the industrial equipment and machinery, it remains uncertain whether or not they are still operative. At this point in the film the noise of the wind and the driving vehicle turns into a minimalist organ-like drone. When the menacing sound fades away, the camera comes to a standstill and focuses on a pack of wild dogs. For several minutes we are witness to the survival behaviour of this small desert community. In an attempt to counter the oppressive temperatures and perpetual sandstorms, the animals restlessly seek shelter behind scattered pieces of waste and dig holes nonstop in the sand. Occasionally they bark as they negotiate their respective places in the grit. In a following short scene we are granted a better view onto the terrain that the dogs occupy. They strategically inhabit a triangular zone between a main road and a desert trail, and upon which many passing vehicles apparently dump their garbage. Following a last frontal view of the animals, the film ends with a shot where one of the roads bordering the dogs' terrain enters the image from the right, again following the line of the horizon. An alarm, gradually rising in intensity, dramatically announces the final scene. Escorted by a police car with flashing lights and siren, a convoy of three massive army trucks with empty trailers drives by the forlorn desert dwellers. Just one dog raises its head to watch the ominous spectacle, if only briefly, and then returns to digging itself a new hole in the sand.[1]

CONTESTED ENVIRONMENTS

MSR is the fourth in a series of films where Catrysse directs his camera at particular landscapes, ranging from a riverbed (*Backdrop*, 2006/2007) and an industrial expanse (*Dusking*, 2009), to a volcano crater (*Outward-bound*, 2011) and a desert plain (*MSR*, 2012). Even though this range at first seems diverse, the four sites share a common feature: namely, industrial exploitation. Respectively, the films focus attention on a site of copper mining, a chemical refinery, sulphur mining and oil drilling. *Backdrop* was shot on the banks of the Copper River in Chitina in southeast Alaska, a small town along train tracks heading towards an old copper-mining area that arguably produced the purest copper in the world; *Dusking* takes place in an artificial landscape that Catrysse constructed in his studio, and doubles as a rough stone excavation area with a ghostly chemical plant; *Outward-bound* was filmed inside the slumbering crater of the Kawah Ijen, a volcano in eastern Java that houses the ancient industry of sulphur mining – today, however, hordes of sightseers flood the site to peek into the gaping mouth of the colossus in search of a sublime, otherworldly experience. As already mentioned, *MSR* was shot in the desert of Kuwait, one of the smallest countries in the world and yet possessing an estimated 6% of the world's oil reserves – an asset that turned it into a site of major military conflict in 1991.

Catrysse clearly does not resort to idyllic spots. His interest lies in places that are marked by a different quality of the picturesque. The artist has a predilection for gloomy locales ravaged by extreme environmental conditions. The settings of *Backdrop*, *Dusking*, *Outward-bound* as well as *MSR* are subject to never-ending storms of sorts. Life in these remote places is absent or invisible, and most definitely unforgiving. Disaster and conflict have either happened there in the past, or will most likely do so in the future. Doom and peril are looming on the murky horizon. Sites such as these, Catrysse notes, have always served as the preferred setting for the popular genre of Science Fiction. Landscapes in the novels of J.G. Ballard or Brian Aldiss or in films like *Alien* or *Mad Max*, are seldom bucolic and affluent, but rather dystopian and ruined. Industrial exploitation, natural catastrophe and violent human interaction define the geography, yet in no particular preferred order, or are represented by sci-fi stand-ins such as a meteor strike or alien invasion.[2] Most importantly, however, landscapes often play an active role within the genre of science fiction, and this especially so in film. Whereas in realistic fiction the setting tends to be primarily a context for the portrayal of character, Mark Rose has argued that the landscape in science fiction often becomes a 'hero'. "The truly active element of the story is frequently neither character nor plot," Rose writes, "but the world the writer creates." [3]

All of Catrysse's films invest in this particular reversal of the traditional role of the landscape in film. "All too often," the artist remarks, "landscapes serve as mere backdrop for the plot." Instead, Catrysse expresses his ambition "to convert a landscape from backdrop into protagonist." [4] The action, in other words, does not taking place within the film's setting but rather is reinforced by it. "The landscape," the artist states, "needs to assert its own moment of acting." Rather than serving as a passive recipient for a set of disparate actions taking place within it, Catrysse's landscapes turn into active agents in and of themselves. Yet apart from the model for *Dusking*, for which most tellingly Catrysse drew inspiration from a 4-second establishing shot of the planetoid in the by now classic sci-fi movie *Alien*, Catrysse did not studio-build fictional film settings.[5] Rather, he has travelled around the globe to unearth them. The desolate and post-

apocalyptic sites that are disclosed in Catrysse's films really exist. They do not belong to futuristic realms of imagination. They are the abode and outcome of past and present-day human conduct. Yet paradoxically, every single film eludes temporal specification. All works wilfully abjure any sense of historical time. Whether we see a flat and deserted topography (*Backdrop*; *MSR*) or a rather jagged and baleful territory (*Dusking*; *Outward-bound*), all captured sites are suspended in a timeless limbo; they seem to inhabit an epoch in-between past and future.

Catrysse bolsters many artists' fascination for temporal reverberations of the impact of 20th-century industry on the natural environment, an interest that can be traced back to the late 1960s - an era that marked the start of global ecological awareness.[6] The very direct effects of the industrial exploitation of planet earth has lead to sites where, as the artist Robert Smithson brilliantly put it in his 1968 landmark essay *A Sedimentation of the Mind*, "remote futures meet remote pasts." [7] These sites, which Smithson aimed to reclaim for massive land sculptures, however still exist. Moreover, with the advent of new and more powerful machinery and the development of ever more sophisticated technologies, the temporal schism that they represented for artists in the 1960s has far from withered away. From Balakhani, a suburb of Baku in Azerbaijan to Rio Tinto in South Africa, the industrial complex's utilization of earth's resources continues to produce environmental catastrophes where the high-tech blends into the pre-historical and vice versa. Engaging with these dramatic ecologies via the medium of film, Catrysse aims to disclose that in such entropic landscapes time is not merely elapsing, but rather is actively acted upon by those very landscapes.

When considered together, *Backdrop*, *Dusking*, *Outward-bound* and *MSR* constitute an articulate sequence, which, upon closer scrutiny, reveals a consistent conceptual agenda and explicit formal tryst. Even though the artist did not conceive them as a quadruplet, together they establish Catrysse's patient exploration of the conventional roles of landscape in the medium of film. We discern how the four consecutive works fuse the artist's initial training as a painter on the one hand with his early experiments with performance-based video on the other. Catrysse subjects the historical genre of landscape painting to a set of formal and conceptual operations that he idiosyncratically derives from early- and late-20th century avant-garde filmmaking and experimental video, as well as from the tradition of popular movie culture and Hollywood cinema. The resulting filmworks fit in neither category; they blend such genres as essay film, expanded cinema, the tableau vivant and documentary fiction.

A SEQUENCE OF FOUR FILMS, AND ONE TRANSITIONAL WORK

Catrysse rarely displays his films on small monitors; he installs and screens them in space. While he uses both single and multi-channel screenings on the walls of the gallery space, he always opts for monumental projection and raucous sound. [8] Viewers are rarely provided with chairs or other seating; they are invited to step into the gallery and experience the projected spectacle on the wall as if it were an extension of the exhibition space. Catrysse doesn't provide a relaxed, soft-cushion movie theatre experience. His film installations force viewer and projected landscape into a dynamic rapport – providing the 'elsewhere' of the projected image with the 'here' of spatial display.[9] In doing so, however, the landscape films reverse the mode of imposed action that we

discern in Catrysse's previous performance-based video pieces. In most if not all of these early works, the camera records the manner by which subjects are exposed to intense somatic conditions that are induced by complex, artificial environments – reminiscent of the bodily experiments with video camera by such artists as Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham and Vito Acconci. Mechanically or even manually handled spatial devices, such as a rotating room (*Unmastered Behaviour*, 2000; *Quartet*, 2002), a revolving circular platform (*Catch-as Catch-Can*, 2005; *Caught in the Act*, 2005-07), a dangling shaft with bulging walls (*Tied*, 2002) or an enormous rocking staircase (*Sudden Death*, 2001), subjected the artist, as well as friends, colleagues or performers to challenging forms of physical exercise. For the claustrophobic *Pursuit* (1998), arguably Catrysse's first true video performance and by any account a spectacular foreboding of the work that was to come, the artist is chased by the camera through a circular paper tunnel constructed in his studio.

The film *Roaring-Stop* (2002) marks the moment of transition between the above-mentioned distinct bodies of work by Catrysse. A haunting loop of 3 minutes and 4 seconds, *Roaring-Stop* comprises two side-by-side projections, filling the entire surface of two adjacent walls that constitute a perpendicular corner in the gallery space, and mirroring the same image of a bumpy valley into a Rorschach-like picture. A sliding camera above a twelve metre-long maquette of a downward sloping, mountainous landscape in the artist's studio recorded the film's footage. With its thundering, ominous soundtrack and its nocturnal, greenish shade, the resulting film holds the middle ground between the covert views rendered by military night-vision goggles on the one hand, or the dim explorations of medical endoscopic cameras on the other, doubling as it were visions of both an external and an internal landscape. Even though the assembled landscape stemmed from the artist's imagination, it prefigured the hazardous settings he would later seek far beyond the spatial confines of the studio.

Catrysse's first expedition to the Copper River in Alaska, in 2006, was triggered by a peculiar "misperception" of the artist while watching the opening minutes of the 2002 American psychological thriller *Insomnia*.^[10] The movie starts with a travelling shot over a glacier in the Far North, the scale of which remains indeterminable due to the proximity and position of the moving camera in relation to the frozen land mass. It was only when the shadow of a plane came into view that the artist realized he was looking at the vast field of a glacier in Alaska, rather than a macroscopic view of some dusty substance. Triggered by this fortuitous moment of perceptual mishap, Catrysse set out to Alaska, seeking to find an equally vast landscape and to use his own means to depict it. The resulting film, *Backdrop*, turns the experience of shifting perception into both subject and effect. Shot from a fixed camera position on a riverbed in a desolate village in southeast Alaska, the film opts for a digitally manufactured split screen along the horizon line. Below the horizon an unrelenting sand storm blows over a vast, dried-out riverbed; above the horizon the storm is equally vigorous at times, yet when the wind subsides the landscape above the horizon subtly changes. Consecutively out of the mist appear a distant mountain ridge, a concrete bridge, a looming black mountain, a bare landscape with a lonesome tree and finally a pinewood constrained by a steep stone cliff. For *Backdrop*, Catrysse fastened the foreground: while the front stage remains the same, the décor in the back is a recurring ghostly apparition. Departing from the usual notion that we need a ground to enable a figure to appear, Catrysse plays with the basic foundations of human perception. Subtly reminiscent of abstract painting's lengthy

experiments with the spatial effects of neighbouring pictorial fields of either horizontal or vertical orientation – for example, Barnett Newman’s early understanding that a horizontal line on an otherwise blank or monochrome canvas inevitably created a horizon, and hence the spatial depth of a landscape – the artist juggles digitally, yet in a most pictorial fashion, with the relative depth of the respective spatial fields of filmed natural and man-made landscapes.[11]

Dusking, a film made in 2009, may be taken as another intermediate moment in Catrysse’s filmic explorations of derelict industrial landscapes. Not unlike *Roaring Stop*, it too was shot in the artist’s studio. Taking its clue, as already mentioned, from a 4 second-long establishing shot of the futuristic horror movie *Alien*, Catrysse tried to achieve the suspense and doom that marks this film fragment. To this end, the artist constructed (out of scrap material) a vast scale-model of 8 by 6 metres of a nocturnal industrial landscape with a decrepit chemical plant, complemented by a smoke machine and fan to generate a miniature storm in both sight and sound. Rather than playing once again with the digital possibilities of spatial depth by splitting the frame of the filmic image, Catrysse retained the images shot by one single camera. The artist then subtly changed the dense and dark landscape in the model for each recording, and these changes were digitally merged into continuous takes.[12] Three of these takes are projected in parallel, generating an overpowering triptych. Enforced by the relentless raging wind, all three constituent filmic images generate material density just as much as they rebuff spatial depth. There’s no way to differentiate between foreground and background, advancing a pictorial totality not unlike some of the most famous examples of abstract painting, yet fully resonant with a present-day state of societal and environmental affairs.[13] At a moment in time when oil has permeated into every facet of cultural life and humanity has consumed more natural resources and produced more waste than the biosphere can safely absorb-and-replace over a one-year span, entropic nullity haunts our future existence on this planet – a spectre that is definitely more real than the threat of an alien power grab.

While chronologically preceded by *Dusking* (2009), the film *Outward-bound* (2010-2011) most effectively advances the concomitant formal and conceptual experiments of *Backdrop*. Once again venturing into a natural landscape burdened by heavy industry, Catrysse surprisingly reverses the perspective from ominous to lyrical. Filmed on the inner flanks of the crater of an active volcano in East Java, Indonesia, the artist now turns his attention to the enterprise of sulphur mining. Equipped with seemingly primeval gear, workers occasionally emerge from clouds of vibrantly coloured fumes. While the working conditions are undeniably unforgiving, if not outright inhuman, the spectacle is nonetheless mesmerizing – holding the middle between the forging of the philosopher’s stone and the burning of corpses of a deadly plague. Once again by superimposing a dramatic soundtrack, Catrysse paints a picture of a landscape in limbo, balancing between past and future, creation and destruction, kismet and doom. “I wanted to evoke a twilight zone that could represent either a new beginning or total destruction”, the artist commented. Yet the combined spatial and compositional disposition of the film, when it is screened, further heightens the experiential impact. *Outward-bound* consists once again of three synchronized projections, aligned side-by-side, and fully covering the wall from floor to ceiling. While each projected sequence is different, all were shot at the same spot in the crater, albeit at a different moment in time. Yet by an ingenious doubling and mirroring of the digital image, an

elongated stretch of landscape at once emerges from the three images projected in parallel. With the aid of the computer, Catrysse gets images to neatly connect and dissolve, as if it were one uninterrupted picture. The resulting triptych presents viewers with a near seamless landscape, while in reality it triple-projects the same site – even if filmed by one and the same camera from one and the same fixed position. So doing, Catrysse flattens out on the gallery walls what in essence constitutes a computer-generated whirlwind of sorts. Viewers are at once virtually withheld from the bustle of the cataclysmic atmosphere, yet still fully immersed in the new and artificial force field the film installs in the gallery space.

ONE OR MORE DOGS

At the conception of *MSR* (2012) lays a small anecdote, yet one with great art-historical resonance. When Catrysse travelled to Kuwait in 2012, he once again had a specific film location in mind.[14] Although the Kuwaiti government shows little or no tolerance towards photographing or filming, he attempted to settle alongside a military airbase. “You know that you will not be welcome,” Catrysse noted, “and that you certainly will not be allowed to depict either the industrial nor the military complex that lodge in the desert.” Warning signs abound throughout the country stating point-blank: “Restricted Area. No photography. No camping.” The army and the oil business are omnipresent, and yet largely obscured from sight. “The true challenge,” said Catrysse, “consisted in revealing the presence of those elements and the associated anguish.” The artist set out to capture the looming sense of a landscape that acted in 1990-91 as the setting for a devastating war, the traces of which have almost completely disappeared from view by either the concealment efforts of the military or the merciless exposure to the desert climate.[15] After having roamed the few roads, which visitors and locals are allowed to drive along, a small shape sticking out of the sand, which he mistakenly took to be a dead animal, caught Catrysse’s eye. Moving closer, he discovered that it was a stray dog sheltering in the sand. When the animal raised its head and ran off, it revealed to the artist a community of canine scavengers trying to survive in that desolate spot.[16]

This anecdote, coupled with the final scene of *MSR*, inadvertently recalls the striking, almost abstract painting *El Perro* by Francesco Goya.[17] The famous painting is diagonally divided in two atmospherically coloured parts, a dark brown soil in the lower part and a murky ochre sky in the upper part, respectively. Just above the sloping horizon, we can distinguish the head of an anxiously upwards gazing dog, its body hidden, or rather obscured by what appears to be a solid earth mass. A little above the dog’s head, a dark whirling haze can be discerned, as if a small sand storm is threatening the animal. If it were not for the dog, we would however not distinguish a landscape at all. Yet any further clue about the environmental specifics is lacking. The dog seems lost in time and space, desperately trying to remain 'afloat', that is, not to be swallowed by the forces of either massive field. While Goya did not shy away from depicting horror in great detail in many of his other famous works, in *El Perro* the painter constrains himself to nearly abstract suggestion.

The dogs in Catrysse’s *MSR* live on a crossroads in the middle of the desert, where the main highway leaving Kuwait City towards the west meets the so-called Military Convoy Main Supply Road, better known as *MSR*, a desert road west of Kuwait City supplying

various army bases in the middle of the desert. The animals dwell in a small triangular zone in between *MSR* and an old dirt road. They don't inhabit the vast, almost universal emptiness enclosing the lone animal in Goya's painting, yet theirs is nonetheless an equally hostile, heavily polluted landscape. The surrounding desert bears the record of human intervention and industrial activity. Moreover, the dogs are not alone. While they do their best to counter the heat and sand storms, they are also witness to the persistent passage of heavy transport vehicles. Only the last sequence of the film reveals that all traffic on the road is of military origin. Present but near invisible, the military makes an almost ghostly apparition at the very end of the film through a convoy of empty trucks, devoid of army gear. These mere carriers, however, effectively allude to the imminent air of destruction that pervades the landscape. "The dogs", the artist noted, "were at first solely an alibi to film." Yet by capturing their competitive survival strategies and witnessing their anxious movements, he managed to seize the very spirit of a landscape that is governed by the intrusive yet incomprehensible regime of the oil industry on the one hand, closely monitored by a hidden yet fully operative military apparatus on the other.

By directing his camera at the wandering animals, Catrysse hints at the sheer impossibility to document, let alone represent the past, present and future terror that marks the Kuwaiti desert. Only a few hundred yards to the north of the junction with this MSR lays Ali Al Salem, a key army-air base of the Kuwait Air Force and a site with an extensive record in both the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War and 2003 Iraqi War. Yet far more to the north in the undifferentiated desertscape is a site of even larger historical resonance. Officially known as Highway 80, a six-lane thoroughfare that runs from Kuwait City to the border town of Safwan in Iraq and then on to the city of Basra. While Iraqi armed divisions had used the road for the 1990 Invasion of Kuwait, it became the scene of extreme horror on the night of February 26-27, 1991. During the United Nations coalition offensive, American and Canadian aircraft and ground forces mercilessly attacked retreating Iraqi military personnel and others escaping Kuwait. While the images of scorched car wrecks and burned corpses to this day remain some of the cruellest documents of the calamities of war, they are all that is left to testify to that extreme act of violence and devastation. Today the 'Highway of Death' shows as little evidence of past war activity or contemporary military presence as does the Military Convoy Main Supply Road. All traces and remnants have disappeared – either cleaned up by the diligent military or worn away by the pitiless desert.

As previously mentioned, the dogs became far more than an alibi to allow depiction of the Kuwaiti landscape and ultimately to make the film *MSR*. Not unlike the animal in *El Perro* by Goya, the dogs set in motion the landscape they endured. In other words, they allowed the artist to 'paint' the picture of the desert that he was pursuing, an inevitably dark one at that.

PLANNING AND HAPPENCHANCE

For *MSR*, the most filmic of his works so far, Catrysse provides no voice-over, subtitles or other factual information. He refrains from any other addition apart from an ominous soundtrack to emphasize the terrain's cataclysmic strangeness. Contrary to the documentary impulse that marks so many present-day artists' films and videos that

address equally contested sites, here the artist relies solely on footage that was shot on the spot. Yet even more importantly, Catrysse opens up the process of recording to chance effect. Once again in stark contrast to the laborious preparations, extensive organization and lengthy scripting that is invested by many of his colleagues working with and in film, Catrysse radically instead opts for concrete outdoor action and the inherent release of control that such implies. This mode of working, I would like to lastly argue, is once more fuelled by the artist's early pursuits in painting and performance. Not unlike the corporeal endeavours of painting and performing, a substantial part of Catrysse's work is initially done on the spot and in the moment. While Catrysse's finished films are the result of extensive montage that is done upon the artist's return to his home and studio, the raw material is procured by means of a fascinating mixture of conceptual premeditation and environmental happenstance. Intrigued by the ongoing liaison between two imperious industries, i.e. the oil companies and the military complex, Catrysse left for Kuwait with no predefined story to tell. On the contrary, once set amidst the desert he acted upon the basic principle that "you have to remain vigilant for chance encounters." Since the latent qualities of worldly landscapes cannot be dictated nor summoned at will, one may just as well yield to the coincidences and opportunities that arise, without warning, from those very landscapes. Yet to register the latter, one best be gifted with a yearning eye and cunning skills.

Most telling in this respect, the stealthy military only permitted the artist to work at the *MSR* junction because he was filming a mere inconspicuous 'presence'. One early confrontation between the artist and a soldier hence produced a most absurd conversation:

"What are you doing?"
"We're filming the dogs."
"Dogs? What dogs?"

[1] While my description of *MSR* suggests a clear and linear narrative, the film is screened in a loop. Hence, there is no explicit beginning or end to the film. Viewers can start watching *MSR* at any given moment in the film.

[2] Brian Dillon, Present Future: Ruins of the 20th Century, in: Art Review Online Magazine, Summer 2012. Reposted on: <http://briangdillon.wordpress.com/2012/06/18/present-future/> (accessed on August 5, 2013).

[3] Mark Rose (ed.), Science Fiction: A Selection of Critical Essays, Prentice Hall, The University of Michigan, 1976, p. 8. I wish to thank Wim Catrysse for referring me to this source.

[4] Wim Catrysse in conversation with the author. In preparation of this article, interviews with the artist were held on 9 September 2012, 22 May 2013, 22 August 2013 and 4 October 2013. All quotations stem from these conversations.

[5] *Dusking*, the artist admitted, was the result of financial scarcity. Lacking the funds to travel to Indonesia to shoot what later became the film *Outward-bound*, Catrysse decided to fabricate a scale model in his studio.

[6] Remarkably enough that ecological awareness is often accredited to the lunar travels that were undertaken in the postwar era, and the landing on the moon by Apollo 11 on July 20 in 1969 – a scenario that belonged until then resolutely to the imaginary realm of sci-fi.

[7] Robert Smithson, *A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects* (1968), in: Jack D. Flam (red). *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, pp. 112-113. Smithson lent the title *Earthworks* from the eponymous novel by Brian W. Aldiss, a book the artist took along on his trip to his former place of residence Passaic. Equally revealing in this respect is the promotional phrase of the 1967 edition of that very novel *Earthworks* by Aldiss: “Into the wasteland of the future comes a beautiful Messiah with a fatal goal: Global war.” For an insightful discussion of the role of Science Fiction in the work of Robert Smithson, I refer to Eugenie Tsai, *The Sci-Fi Connection: The IG, J.G. Ballard, and Robert Smithson*, in: Edward Leffingwell and Karen Marta (eds.), *Modern dreams. The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop*, New York / Cambridge Mass., Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S. 1 Museum and the Clocktower Gallery / MIT Press, 1988, pp. 70-75.

[8] The first time I saw the film *MSR* was in the artist’s studio in Antwerp. Together we looked at his computer screen, while the sound came out of a set of small speakers. Even though I was immediately fully taken by the beauty and suspense of the film, I only came to grasp its true qualities a few months later. On the occasion of a one-day inaugural show of a studio of a colleague artist, the film was screened in a cinema room on a wall-filling screen and enforced by a powerful stereo system. Engulfed by both image and sound, I came to realize the importance of the corporal experience of watching the film. The spatial installation underscored the enduring sense of disquiet and impending doom that characterize the film. Moreover, the depicted landscape gained a new level of resonance.

[9] Stan Douglas & Christopher Eamon (eds.), *The Art of Projection*, Hatja Cantz: Ostfildern, 2009, p. 8.

[10] *Insomnia* (2002) directed by Christopher Nolan and starring Al Pacino, Robin Williams and Hilary Swank, was a remake of a 1997 Scandinavian film of the same name.

[11] For a brilliant discussion of the verticality of Barnett Newman’s zip painting, I refer to Yve-Alain Bois, *Perceiving Newman*, in: *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1993, pp. 187-213. About the effect of a horizontal line, Bois argues, Newman came to understand that they “read like a horizon”: “The pictorial field is negated as a whole, the background recedes and the painting reads like an abstract landscape.” (p. 196).

[12] The singular image of *Dusking*, however, is turned into a triple synchronized parallel projection.

[13] The film *Dusking*, I would like to argue here, is marked by a pictorial tension between the particular and the whole that not only an artist like Donald Judd so much praised in a Jackson Pollock painting, yet also deeply reverberates with the nature of the very scenery that is depicted. See, a.o. Donald Judd, Jackson Pollock [Arts Magazine, April 1967], in: Complete Writings 1959-1975, Halifax, Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2005, pp. 193-195; Donald Judd, Barnett Newman (1970), in: ibidem, pp. 193-195.

[14] While Catrysse travelled to Indonesia with the clear goal to see and film the Kawah Ijen volcano, his trip to Alaska, which resulted in the film *Backdrop*, didn't have a geographically predefined destination. He ended up in Chitina in southeastern Alaska, dropped off there during his hitchhiking tour through the region to follow the old railroad line from the mine to the coast.

[15] Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness* (1992) obviously served as a key reference for Catrysse while making *MSR*, just as much as the two other films that Herzog classifies as Sci-Fi, namely *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005) and the early film *Fata Morgana* (1971) which was mostly shot in the southern Sahara region of Africa. Catrysse is deeply familiar with the work of Herzog. In 2011 he was selected to attend a Master Class with the German filmmaker in London, which took place in a hotel, the address of which was held secret to the larger public.

[16] I borrowed the beautiful description 'canine scavengers' from the catalogue essay by T.J. Demos on the sumptuous film *Giardini*, Steve McQueen's contribution to the Venice Biennale in 2009. See: T.J. Demos, "Giardini: A Fairytale," in Steve McQueen, British Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2009.

[17] *El Perro*, one of the so-called Black Paintings that the Spanish artist painted directly onto the walls of the Quinta del Sordo, a country house outside Madrid he occupied in the early 1820s.