

[ok now this is getting a bit more fun]

-----  
TESSERAE of VENUS (TESSERA-REMIX with VENUS JPL)

a speculatively-carbonated froth

Christina McPhee 2007

In re: [Tesserae of Venus](#)

Tesserae are created is by a shortening of planetary crust. On Venus, when the crust is pushed together, the surface folds, buckles, and breaks. The tessera disturb, contract, and throw up new figures against strange grounds. Earth's atmosphere is becoming more like Venus, a carbon-saturated atmosphere. The logic of the tessera figure creates a question of possibility, against its own inexorable process. A surface of information, when it folds in on itself, also releases, making new structures that push out of the breaks.

Tesserae suggest emergent figurations. The phenomena of the tesserae are like the ridges at the point of contact between inevitable processes of nature and our playful interventions in it. Who appears in the gaps?

scenario/synopsis

Tesserae-Remix with VENUS JPL images not-too-future possible world where carbon levels might exceed the sequestration mechanisms of Earth's vegetation (grasslands, see Slipstreamkonza, rainforests, etc. Our Earth's atmosphere is inching towards Venus. We're having trouble breathing. Petroleum consumption still rages though, despite widespread asthma and death from collapsed lungs. New sources of oil rich shale and tar have been found on Venus, ending decades of speculation about the possibility of carbon-based life forms on the planet of love. A pipeline has been formed virtually through a series of wireless stations. The unrefined oil shale sludge is converted through biofeedback relay cables into protozoic nanotextile filaments. Upon their arrival on the carbon choked Earth, the filaments dissipate and spread out in a progressively more attenuated, pliable mesh on top of huge floating platforms in the ocean. These are repurposed from ruined oil rigs. The mesh form extended tesserae, also known as "complex ridged terrain" Physically, tesserae are created is by a shortening of planetary crust. On Venus, when the crust is pushed together, the surface folds, buckles, and breaks. On the Earth, the pliable mesh tesserae, being alien, immediately cause the formation of antibodies and allergic reactions on skin surfaces both human, animal and neural-network sensitive, like touch pads. A surface of information, when it folds in on itself, also releases, making new structures that push out of the breaks. On the very large platforms, formerly oil rigs, the mesh ripples in the heavy air against a backdrop of glorious sunsets. The biofeedback cables for the mesh are attached via cantilevered outboards to a carbon emission registry system. As the mesh interfaces the cables, the registry system releases identification numbers for citizens based on the levels of petrochemical fumes inside each tube of mesh.

In video installation, the tessera might play through animated sequences that are created from mining the archive of high resolution radar images of surface topographies of Venus, recorded by the Magellan mission, Jet Propulsion Lab, in the late nineties. In the spirit of the prophetic fantasies of Constant, by the agency of a magical displaced geomorphology--

Beyond the technical exploration of tesseraed image mapping animations, I like the richness of the tessera as a generative metaphor. The tessera's complexity as a nonlinear visual force field, in which ridges form at points of breakage/convergence, may be echoed in the treatment of a digital video image and audio palimpsest. One might deploy the tessera as computational architectural superimpositions of displaced cultural meanings onto a nonsense 'data' field.

Viewing with skepticism the infatuation of designers with computational visualization techniques, the project could satirize the vogue for making design decisions on the basis of results from 3d modelling of statistical databases that, because they are modelled from data, seem to assume that referencing 'data' and 'database' instantiates a *priori* truth claims that can justify ideal 'form'.

Animation fragments, frame by frame, push together into video and audio tessera 'drawings' in real time. The drawings might animate at a rate of flow developed through an archive interface (via Max/MSP/Jitter) of Venutian landscape files.

I'd like to work with his "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space, " (1966), a text which anticipates hypertext with side column notations, annotated photographs ('reproduced reproductions') and mathematical ratios ("indeterminate information") (see Eugenie Tsai and Cornelia Butler, et al, Robert Smithson, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, catalog, p. 216.

See also Pamela M. Lee, "Ultramoderne: Or, How George Kubler Stole the Time in Sixties Art," Grey Room 02, pp. 47-73, winter 2001.

Lee suggests we read "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space" " as a push/pull dynamic--both visually and textually--between entropy and control, progress and fatigue, signal and noise, pastness and futurity.

Mannerist excess in the midst of carbon glut. Animations of the already-fantastical speculative writing of Robert Smithson, whose "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space, " (1966) anticipates hypertext with side column notations, annotated photographs ('reproduced reproductions') and mathematical ratios ("indeterminate information"). In an early draft of what was to become "Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space" , Smithson writes:

"Around a series of inaccessible abstractions, I shall construct an inaccessible system that has no inside or outside, but only the dimension of reproduced reproductions... To formulate a general theory of this inconceivable system would not solve its symmetrical perplexities... Arcane codes and extravagant experiments conceal the absolute abstraction." (Smithson, 1966).

Flash animations of Smithsonian fragments may unfold and simultaneously crunch (like tesserae). In a double-alienated context (Venus/Smithson), tactically, a hypertextual poesis, is possible. One could deploy Smithson's text into a wildly improbable 'site' (Venus), while navigating 'through' Venus via episodic diaries.

Christina McPhee 2007