TrainPan Matrix

Project Description

I like exploring databases of images – searching for relationships and building visual experiences of large data sets. I'm interested in how algorithmic processes compile visual data and how different this is from how we humans experience the world, i.e., the difference between how computers and humans see/experience the world we both observe. Data sets underlie the algorithms that we are coding up in order to produce ever more intelligent artificial processes, and as such are fundamental to the success or failure of whatever 'intelligence' these may possess.

Japan Matrix – 8/13-24/2019 is an installation compiled from 5466 panoramic images taken while collecting material for my *TrainPan – Japan* series. The images are stitched together in the order they were captured. The size and format of the work changes to suit the location.

This piece is a visual record of a significant portion of the Tokyo Metropolitan area as seen from public rail lines. Viewed from afar it appears as a pattern woven by place, time and weather – a document of many hundreds of miles of images, from the scores of train lines that knit together this great city. But if you come closer and look at the individual images strung together like lines of code, this vast compiled image is a dataset, comprised of neighborhoods, streets and homes – sometimes writ large against the sky, while elsewhere described with the most trivial details.



This is the appearance of individual rows when the project is built to 2m high by 50cm wide



A vertical build of the complete project

There is so much information recorded in these ribbons of images that one might fear the intrusion. But if you look closer and think a little about what is missing, you find that whole swaths of terrain are gone, the rivers have been swallowed up and it would seem that this world is one largely uninhabited by humans. It is this juxtaposition of real and unreal that interests me, the reality of these concrete places, against their almost casual distortion. The resultant work is a representational 'dataset' that on one hand clearly tells us much about the city, and yet is so fundamentally thin as to be almost meaningless in other ways.

Why is this tension interesting? Because it speaks to a core problem to developing artificial intelligence processes, i.e. that the 'worlds' from which our fledgling 'intelligences' are incubated may in fact be very large, but they are also in their own way thin and anomalous, as are the resulting 'artificial intelligences'.



The original image files for the photos are 2500px in height and range from 2000-16,000px wide

The Images

I use the iPhone as a slit-scan camera. The images are directly recorded with the panorama function and not manipulated other than cropping and color correction. I attach the phone to a train's window and use the panorama function to compile an image from the environment we pass through. If a photograph is a frame, a window into a moment, this approach produces an algorithmic window recording the bits of moments, connected-disjointed, flashing by in front of the lens. Each piece is reduced, compressed and finally stitched into the emerging photograph by the phone's algorithms – sometimes a hundred yards and a few seconds, other times it is miles and minutes.