Peter Alwast

'Everything' as a meta-picture in motion

Projected light has been conceived as an immaterial, intangible thing that carries with it memories of a world of shadows. The mirages that course over screens (from shadow puppetry to cinema) are understood as partitioning our physical world from a realm beyond. The myriad realms that computer-based media contain and present within a frame — the monitor — underscore the portal-like quality of moving images, with the laptop as gatekeeper. These plural cosmos now coexist within our visual perception of the 'real' and require consensual participation — call it belief — in those virtual spaces which are not yet accessible by our bounded and mortal bodies.

Peter Alwast's video and sound work *Everything* 2008 intercedes in, and is generated from, the computer-driven world, and exploits its capacity to bridge seemingly disparate artistic disciplines. Alwast's own art practice encompasses painting, drawing, video and animation, and in this work he depicts the connections and seepages between these diverse disciplines and media, channelling them through the medium of digital animation so they are presented as 'equivalents'. Across three projections, *Everything* enacts a kind of storyboard presentation of virtual space. As part of the three-screen looping sequence, each frame aligns momentarily to reveal a vast panorama

and unified view, while in the next instant the scene splits once more.

Computer-generated images (CGI), and their appearance on screen, have the capacity to represent the surfaces of things in much the same way as painting does (minus mass). However, using the 3-D modelling tools now readily accessible, our position and perspective as viewers need not be fixed. Multiple views of an object can be simultaneously presented and viewed in the round, and our viewpoint can shift, turn and move through this constructed zone as if it was physically traversable. This is complicated, though, when we consider that we do not have unlimited observational faculties — we can be presented with simultaneous multiple views, depths and angles, but we cannot make our perceiving mind into more than itself. It cannot be doubled or tripled or more.

The constructed human set of *Everything* presents a collision of objects, materials and structures, each with strong associative qualities. A new wooden framework of a domestic house is silhouetted against a bright sky, and its armature can only partially contain a full glowing moon whose sphere protrudes easily past the cage of one wall. Day and night coexist and undermine temporal distance. The cratered moon, depicted in almost black and white, is in

turn spliced with a screen showing a film where the camera seems to circle an unattended microphone set-up in a small park rotunda at night. A soundtrack of a gospel preacher can be heard singing out like a disembodied ghost, perhaps to a small and disinterested audience gathered at nightfall at the rear of this quaint structure. Cut-out rectangles within the screen reveal yet further scenes behind. By setting different forms of visual language *mise-en-abime* — or as video within video within computer model and so on — a complicity with forms of 'hybrid media' is made paramount.[1]

The unlikely melding of objects in *Everything* becomes much more logical when we notice Alwast invokes the active presence of a grey non-space. It operates like a green screen on a film set where CGI effects can seamlessly insert nearly anything. Within the landscape, convex mounds like giant mirrored fish-eye lenses play and distort real-time video of a suburban street, and the muted colour of this 'real' footage contrasts with the Pantone-esque palette of the software-modelled objects. Water seeps across the floor but with a convex meniscus, behaving like mercury. As cameras turn corners, rising or swooping through this set, candy-coloured tubes spill a milky liquid onto the floor. Alwast's conception of image and its linguistic referent plays out across the disquieting
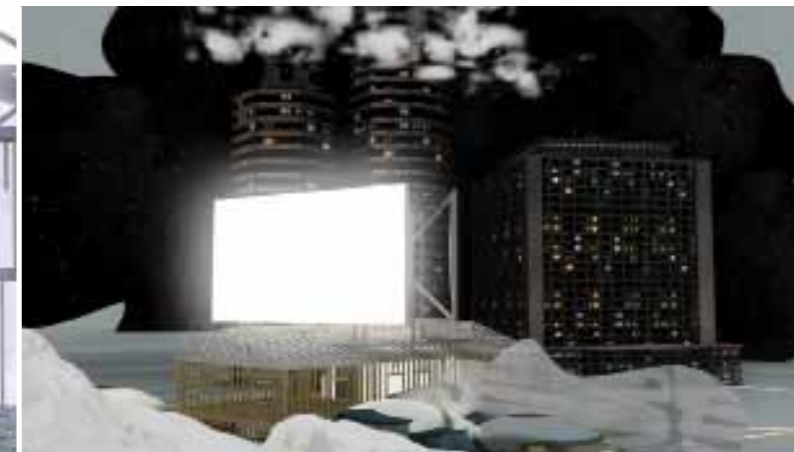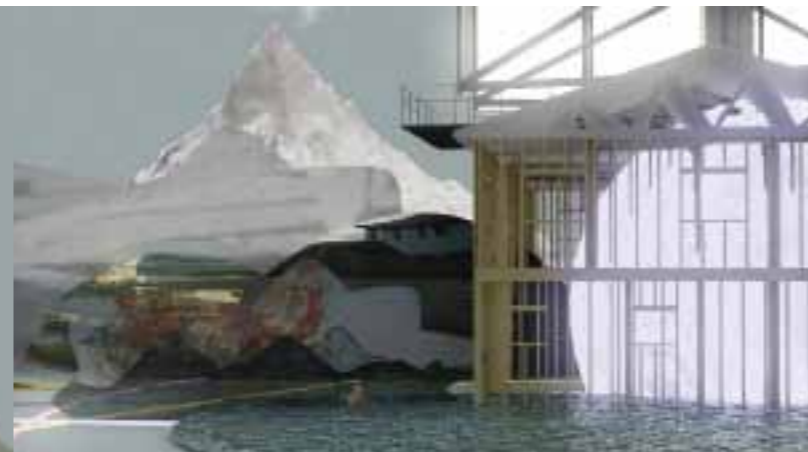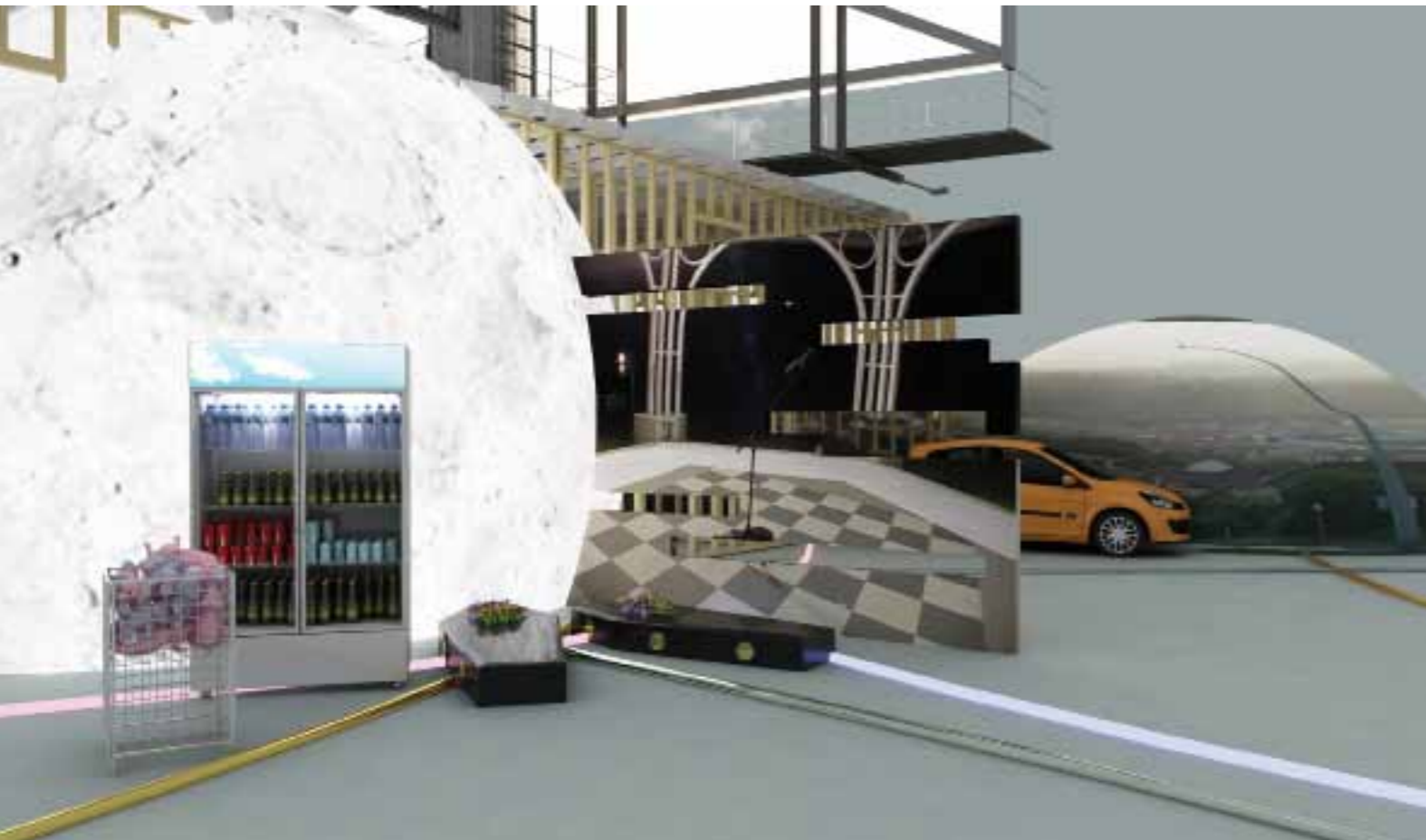
soundtrack, where the 'piping' makes its way into the music of bagpipes.

As a composition, where all of the contents are digitised and 'equivalent', *Everything* presents a dispassionate and yet poetic consideration of wider societal issues like urban development and its effects, or mass-marketing and consumerism, while also privileging the role of memory and the personal within real and virtual spaces.

Alwast describes the idea for the work as stemming from an experience of sitting at his computer and shifting his gaze between the screen and the view through his window to the adjacent car park beyond, as a variety of web-cam images flashed across his monitor. It was the 'simultaneity of the mediated distant images brought to proximity and direct spatial experience of the car park made distant' that figured for the artist a perceptual disjunction of space and time, offering an alternative way to perceive binary oppositions such as those between day and night, inside and outside, private and public, proximity and distance.[2]

In *Everything* a white, glowing and content-less billboard announces its own vacancy, and against Alwast's equivalencies of representation, both visual and auditory, and via their programmability, we could see this billboard as the ultimate 'empty sign'. Alwast's projection is still intangible. The appearance of things are shown to be arcane monuments that point back to our world of solids, as all that we see is made up of pixels and formulas.

Peter Alwast's *Everything* can be seen as a 'meta-picture' through the way in which his triptych interrogates the conditions under which it is made. His charged 'non-spaces' attest to the possibilities of the 'not yet mapped out'. It is at the edges of this constructed universe that there exists a new kind of aesthetic sublime; one now allowed for and delimited by algorithms.

Naomi Evans

Endnotes
1   Lev Manovitch, 'Understanding hybrid media', in *Animated Painting* [exhibition catalogue], San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, 2007, pp.36–45.
2   Peter Alwast, 'General notes, Aug. 2008', unpublished artist statement.

Everything (video stills)
2008