



<http://www.alexandertaylor.org>



Preface.

In the early part of the 21st century, as part of a collaboration between several leading major technology companies, tens of millions of images that had been uploaded to photo sharing sites were scraped, processed, and sorted into strict categories using a mixture of crowdsourced labour and computer vision. Compiled for the purposes of recognising room-types in order to improve the accuracy of digital targeted advertising, this action had the unintended consequence of creating and globally exporting a visual back-up of cultural reality as it existed in North America at the time. As computer vision powered automation systems became more ubiquitous, any form that strayed too far from its counterpart in the image database ran the risk of misclassification; any anomalous forms were perceived as erroneous, irrevocably anchoring us to a specific moment in visual history.



1.

You are currently situated within a dated ISO compliant smart-home located in a permanent residential zone on the border between the IFOA Science & Technology Park and the Centurial Economic City and Ski-Resort. The city you inhabit is compromised of 1,405 zones that slip in and out of activation based on a convoluted mixture of trade agreements, timezones and currency market movements; the atomisation of urban centres has led to constantly shifting patterns of zonification in which laws and tariffs are constantly in flux dependant on the results of ongoing global corporate bidding wars. Exploring the city becomes almost impossible on foot; the software required to legally navigate its circuitry is unaffordable to all but major shipping and logistics corporations. As the streets become more hostile to civilians, many retreat to their homes, which increasingly begin to take on functions of offices, plazas and leisure centres. To live outside of automation develops into a form of social signalling reserved for the most affluent.



2.

Your environment is compromised of a densely woven network of interconnected objects, each square meter of space a blank slate ready to be activated by the right assortment of material nodes and sensor readings. Each object in the room has been arranged at a perfectly perpendicular angle to the camera for maximum visual legibility. The gaze of the machine takes priority over that of the human; the system's uptime reads at 99.999999%.

You agree that your anonymised data can be collected in the interests of system improvements. Manual overrides are slowly driven out as the hardware is rendered more seamless; foolproof and tamperproof, it represents the perfect marriage of hardware and software. You notice the settings menu begins to gradually minify until one day it disappears entirely. Everything you own is rented and subject to updates, upgrades and recalls.



3.

You watch the bubbles flow in the ISO compliant lava lamp in your room as your favourite song plays again. Each of the 58 objects* in your possession congeal to form an airtight network, impenetrable to all but custom self-diagnostic systems. Tolerance for abnormality is low; bright colours, particularly green, are to be avoided. Intensive body modification can lead to a forced lockout. Any behaviour (or lack of behaviour) detected by the system gets collapsed, flattened and filed into a recognisable category for processing; It did not take long for those who lived erroneous or unclassifiable lifestyles to be rendered invisible to the system, their living spaces unusable. Posture, body weight, gait, and facial expressions are compressed into protocol-friendly data; to ensure legibility your behaviours take on an excessive, performative quality. Gentle nudges in behaviour ricochet through the neural network like dominos; you are both the creator and consumer of your own bespoke domestic reality system.

*You consider applying for an upgraded object capacity after you have returned from your next bout of mandatory content moderation duty.



4.

Though its architecture relies on data collected in the past — in some cases, decades ago — the illusion of the real-time must be upheld; the machine learns, but it has no memory. The system has not been updated in a few years now; glitches get caught in its hairs and become ensnared in feedback loops, swelling like tumours as your coping tactics too become data for processing.

Once all friction has been removed from daily tasks you are equipped with instantaneous access to your desires, which is undesirable. The system learns to introduce new frictions; randomised timeouts, frustrations, and hostilities. The introduction of the occasional randomised electric shock paradoxically had a positive net benefit on your overall mood. The speaker in your wall calls you an idiot before pumping sulphur into the atmosphere; your face becomes less flush, and you fall asleep 14 minutes quicker than usual. A great deal of tension and scepticism develops between you and the system, though you acknowledge your interests are broadly aligned.

