How does a machine read the sky?

The horizon is something that we tend to take as a universal and objective reality: it is the line at which the earth's surface and the sky meet. Yet, if we recall the last time we gazed outside, we know that this crisp and seemingly fixed line off in the distance is actually an ever-moving perception of distance formed by our physical position upon the earth's surface. It is this 'line', however, which allows us the perspective to situate ourselves within the environment. Through doing so, allowing us to measure the concept of distance itself.

Emmalyn Hawthorne explores these phenomena in her exhibition *Astrolabe*, where she presents a digital transcription of what one perspective of a horizon could be. Using the interior of TCB as the central point of the exhibition's perspective, Hawthorne employs each of the gallery's four walls to demarcate a 90-degree section of skyline. She then creates digital renderings of this perspective by employing a combination of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software and 3D printing which 'read' the skyline as though it were handwriting by comparing the curves and angles it finds to its databases of those that appear in written text. To this process Hawthorne says:

> Sometimes just jumbles of letters and punctuation come out and other times whole words or phrases. Skylines and words are similar in that the way we perceive them is highly dependent upon our own positioning within both physical and cognitive landscapes.

The resultant models are a poetic rendering of a specific moment in the history of our built environment, a 'machine-thought' interpretation of site-specificity and a deep dive into the field of etymology.

In *Astrolabe*, Hawthorne encourages audiences to think deeply about our environments, how we connect with each other, and how our very interpretation of spatial awareness can be fodder for creative exploration. While we often realise that we think differently to others, Hawthorne reminds us that we also conceptualise our environments in a subjective way. But she doesn't leave us on the edge of the precipice (or isolated within an invisible ring); instead, she uses language to connect our differences and to lighten the weight of phenomenological experience.

Words by Naarm/Melbourne based writer and curator Tess Maunder.