Paula Albuquerque

PhD Candidate in Artistic Research

University of Amsterdam / Gerrit Rietveld Academy

Webcam Film Making - Algorithmic Cinematic Chronotopes

Realtime Ellipsis 2011

Introduction

The proposed paper is based upon the fourth chapter of my ongoing PhD Dissertation and focuses on the politics of Webcam[1] Filmmaking - as artists appropriate publicly accessible surveillance footage.

It starts by providing a brief account of Jonathan Beller's attention economy theory so as to relate the realm of constant "visuality" to the contemporary reality of the Webcams. Next, it will move on to deconstruct the commonsensical notion of Realtime and challenge its stake in Webcam footage's documental value. As a follow up, the text will examine the potential for Webcams to generate Cinematic Chronotopes that would stand in for the so-called reality being captured in

Realtime. In the same spirit, it will then define the contours of Webcams as emerging Cinematic Apparatus. The paper will conclude by presenting examples of artists who reclaim Webcams as medium/prime matter, as well as common people who subvert their one-way communication circuitry taking conscious steps towards first-person production of urban reality representation.

Urban Surveillance - Constant Visuality and the Attention Economy

Urban surveillance's cinematic potential can be analyzed through extending the attention economy theory to the contemporary reality of the Webcams and, therefore, concentrating on the present day phenomenon of constant "visuality" (Beller 2009). Contemporary communication generally takes place through screens, be it institutional or familial as most relations have become mediated. Screens instruct about the social and dictate/regulate consumption, while most labour occurs through the screen and leisure takes place in front of it - Internet surfing or film watching. The attention dedicated to what the screens mediate has become invaluable and is stimulated on all fronts, increasing the production of visuality: by watching images the viewer contributes to their further replication. Perception, presently the highest fiduciary human potential is 'given away for free', in the so-called free time. Wage labour revenues spent on purchasing electronic equipment allow for our attention to be dedicated to imagery solely generated to capture it - be perceived by it. People are constantly at work, and kept away from other activities, even when entertaining themselves by watching movies or surfing the Internet, i.e. looking for Realtime Webcam imagery of urban streets (Beller 2009).

Realtime is Fake

The notion of Realtime attributed to the Webcams' live transmission falsely substantiates the claim that these *truthfully* depict "urban reality": this commonsensical conceptualization should be deconstructed in order to undermine their imagery's "documental value". Realtime is measured in new units of time necessary to include the increased speed of computer information

processing in the archaic temporal conception provided by Enlightenment – the nanosecond and the picosecond (respectively, a billionth and a trillionth of a second). Realtime has, thus, become chronoscopic rather than chronologic, matching Network (Internet) time due to technological acceleration. However, when discussing Webcam imagery, the speed of data transmission does not necessarily influence content perception. This is still believed to occur in clock time. It could be agreed that the data transmission and their perception take place in different however concurring "timescapes" or internal experiences of temporality (Adam 1998). Realtime, thus, both chronologically and chronoscopically, may be considered a "timescape", a temporal dimension that is felt internally, experienced subjectively and running parallel to several other temporalities ecologically determined by the Network. In China, as in most other countries, Webcams are delayed in their transmission so as to allow for their content to be scrutinized.

By watching Webcam feeds, one can acknowledge the investment behind their placement in a specific area: Times Square is crowded by a multitude of cameras, in HD 3 D stereo sound quality, revealing images of a highly secured urban area, undoubtedly captured by Surveillance Cameras (even if unmentioned as such) and that efforts have been made to render the surveilled area most appealing to the cameras: people can shop in peace and the "frame-able" reality has been prepared for its close up, as Fernanda Bruno and Hella Koskella would probably agree.

The state-of-the-art Times Square' cameras are expensive and transmit at high-frame rates, while cameras placed in poorer regions of the world have slower update rates and and, therefore, fail to even come close to any existing notion of Realtime. The higher the fidelity of the device (including the image resolution and sound quality), implying more financial means invested, the less 'real' reality becomes since it implies a higher control of the *area at risk*. It might be 'realistic' but the reality of it is linked to that of the reasons behind the cameras' inception and ownership, which include risk management and preemptive action (higher fidelity) or an affective dimension born out of the personal relationship to the

Webcam (lower update rates). It is realistic, but not real. In the case of the Surveillance Cameras, it is the representation of the nothingness of the present that attempts to erase a dangerous future. "Surveillance now not only keeps track of *past* movements, it tries to anticipate *future* flows" (Lyon 2001:2011). Individuals who perform erratically - such as 'street bums' - stand out and will be removed from the frame. People not represented in the picture, seem inexistent in Realtime – as workers, consumers or citizens. These features render these cameras as producers of visions and fictional constructions, not documenters of reality – quickly metamorphosing themselves into cinematic apparatuses. Both official Surveillance Cameras and Personal Webcams provide a - future - portrait of the world, which is represented in accordance to their own technology and its ownership: a world where most locations seem similar in appearance - shopping streets, highways and malls - where views are taken from above, and we see our (double)selves as an Other - consumer, worker and citizen.

The Potential to generate Chronotopes

 "(...) the cinematic is a category of experience, a performative that comes into being in the encounter between the human body and its environment" (Hesselberth 2012). In the city, this encounter takes place in a space and a time that is predetermined and designed by the medium of the Webcams. It happens at two levels: in the observation of the streets as well as in the streets themselves. The embodiment of the subject, occurs when it comes in contact with Cinematic Chronotopes – space-time units that rework its very spatial and temporal notions as well as those of agency. These cinematic chronotopes are all the more efficient if they take place in a time that is considered the present (the realtime of the Webcams) and allow one to feel the urgency of a sense of space to which one belongs (the urban space of the cities). In contact with these two dimensions, there is an immediate sense of connection and embodiment of the experience – this is the realm of the Cinematic Chronotope generated by Webcams: a magnificent hub of pre-scripted 'tableaux vivants' where people in the streets embody pre-assigned roles.

The Cinematic Apparatus of the Webcams

In the light of the Attention Economy theory, the presence of Webcams in every dependency of life appears as a good example of networked expropriation. Their omnipresence is justified by public safety and preemptive action, hiding their true function which is that of organizing and regulating social practices and conducts; they subjectify the object of their observation by imputing it with a potential identity - anyone can represent a danger to society at some point - and they determine the veracity of time and space - realtime is a construction and realspace is built as set: In short, a perfect cinematic apparatus. In the view of Jonathan Beller, the longer one remains in the realm of visuality, the less "interior life" one is left with, the more communal time is reduced and the possibilities towards revolutionary action become, thus, scarce. The Webcam, as Cinematic Apparatus, contributes not only to the time spent by the viewer behind the computer monitor observing the streams but also to the regulation of the city space into film plateaus, where a controlled action - potentially dramatic - is constantly unravelling. This networked system represents an ideal scenario for authorities working to enforce the regulation of social relations and practices in the public and the private spheres. Under the illusion of being safe and having access to unlimited amounts of information, the viewer is caught up in a bubble of constructed data that acts as a shield against interpersonal relations and 'life in the world'. The individual routinely lives in constant hallucination under the influence of pulsating pixels cut off from the material world. That is, if he/she doesn't attempt to make out the electronic dream from the daydreaming by deconstructing the apparatus and hacking it to engage with the other.

From Passive Perception to Active Production

It could be regarded that is no coincidence that the 'birth of cinema' occurs in the same year as Freud's publication of the theory of the unconscious. This could imply that cinema is the actual unconscious and that all new media technologies enlarge its effects (Bellerophon 2009). In a cinematic world, in constant contact

with film, televisuals, and the internet, one is possibly unconscious from morning to night... and then, one sleeps. If, in addition, the space outdoors is accepted as having been reorganized to fulfill the necessity for the cinematic apparatus to develop with no constraints, or better even, made safe for pre-scripted roles to be played, then people's only contribution is probably their labour as perceivers, perpetuating this state of affairs. Through the Webcams' presence, the world has become a 'safe' place where the individual moves around, unconscious, simultaneously passively receiving visual content and actively perceiving it – producing capital.

Artists' consciousness of the above has empowered them to use Webcams as Cinematic Medium to produce artistic statements that are political in kind, e.g. Jill Magid and Mano Luksch. Their artworks are in this paper relevant as practice-based theorizations of the contemporary street surveillance, which has turned our cities into film sets with pre-scripted 'realities'. Part of this corpus, my Webcam film "Flawed Narratives" (2013) focuses on the artificial construct of the reality being depicted by deconstructing the Webcams as Medium and exposing it as a Cinematic Apparatus.

By bending the circuitry, artists are able to break through the unilateralism of Webcams. In this they are not alone: another emerging political strength of deconstructing the dispositif-based power of surveillance arises by the burgeoning use of the imagery as a bilateral means of communication by common people. Beyond known examples of performative actions such as those of the "Surveillance Camera Players", who use CCTV to make films/plays which are edited live on stage in front of an audience, other examples can found among everyday city dwellers, i.e. the younger generation of Japanese tourists who anno nu, even if primitively, call their moms back home and wave at them from within the frame of a London Webcam.

Concluding, and tying in with Beller's ideas urging to lead one's own unconscious activity as well as Hesselberth's theories about the creation of Cinematic Chronotopes, it becomes gradually more apparent that ways could be designed

to mark the move from Passive Individual Perception to a more self-empowered Active Conscious Collective Production within the realm of Visuality.

Flawed Narratives 2013

---

[1] There is a distinction to be made between CCTV belonging to businesses and Personal Webcams that can become affected objects according due to a more intimate relationship with their owners.

Paula Albuquerque

Webcam Film Making - Algorithmic Cinematic Chronotopes

Bibliography

Andrew, Dudley. *What Cinema Is!* West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Blackwell Manifestos.

Baudry, Jean-Louis, "'Ideological effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus' [orig. 1974]." *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Reader*. Ed. Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986[a]. 286-298.

Beller, Jonathan. *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College University Press, 2006.

Brian, Massumi. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

Castells, Manuel. "The Edge of Forever: Timeless Time." *The Rise of the Netweork Society.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackweel. 1996. 460-499.

Doanne, Mary-Ann. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Hesselberth, Pepita, "Cinematic Chronotopes: Affective Encounters in Space-Time". (PhD diss., Amsterdam University 2012).

Lyon, David. *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life.* Buckingham. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001:2011.

Rodowick, David Norman. *The Virtual Life of Film*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Shaviro, Steven. *Post-Cinematic Affect.* Winchester, UK: 0-Books, John Hunt, 2010.

Virilio, Paul, "Le krach visuel", in *La television fragmenté, Mille chaines en bodquets*, Actes du colloque des Xèmes rencontres du 4 au 7 décembre 1997, Valence: Édition le crac, 1998.

Paula Albuquerque

Experimental filmmaker
PhD Candidate in Artistic Research at University of Amsterdam

Exhibitions

2013 "MIT8 mini exhibit" – showcase of participating artists in the Public Media Private Media Conference, Venue Lobby, Cambridge, Boston, US.
2013 "Investigations III – Research and Visualization" – WallScreen projection of "Realtime Ellipsis" is shown at group show about Artistic Research with i.e. Daniela de Paulis and Martin Brandsma, DeFKa Campis, Stedelijk Museum Assen, The Netherlands.
2012 "Bucuti 2121212" and "GMT minus 5" shown at the Amsterdam University Theatre together with audiovisual works from participating artists within the context of the ASCA Workshop, The Netherlands.
2011 "Cyber Safari" selected as part of "Road Movie" presented by The One Minutes Foundation at, among others, Amsterdam Museum, deBuren in Brussels, Centraal Museum in Utrecht, Cultuurwerf/Buro Beeldende Kunst in Vlissingen, Graphic Design Museum in Breda, Haarlem College, Kunsthal KAdE in Amersfoort, NIMK (Netherlands Media Art Institute) in Amsterdam, Schunck* in Heerlen, and the TwentseWelle in Enschede.
2010 "GMT minus 5" and "Split Recognition" shown at Kunstvlaai, Westergasfabriek, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2010 "GMT minus 5" shown at the Bienal Novos Valoures, Galeria Vieira da Silva, Portugal.
2010 "Split Recognition" Installation shown at "Have we Met?" event, Sandberg Instituut, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2010 "Split Recognition" (projection version) and "GMT minus 5" shown at Nederlands Instituut voor Mediakunst, Sandberg Night, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2010 "Nanook of the North" Split-Screen One Minutes Experiment shown in Boijmans van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.
2009 "GMT minus 5" shown at International Amsterdam Film Festival Exhibition, De Balie, The Netherlands.
2009 Selection of experimental One Minutes films, Rietveld Arsenale, Venice Bienale, Italy.
2009 Selection of experimental One Minutes films, Art Amsterdam, Art Fair, The Netherlands.
2009 "Mountain Soundtrack for Skyscrapers", site-specific sound installation for "Software" event, Amsterdam Zuidas, The Netherlands.
2009 "Chungking 29", site-specific video installation, "Umbrella" exhibition, Organhaus Art Space, Chongqing, China.
2009 "GMT minus 5" video art piece at "Women on the Verge of a Breakdown" exhibition, integrated in "Young Curators Initiative", Arte Contempo Gallery, Lisbon, Portugal.
2008 "Gdansk" shown in Videotage, Hong Kong, China.
2008 "World One Minutes Exhibition", Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal.
2008 "Zone Time II" Audiovisual Real-Time Performance at Electronic Arts Festival "Abertura II" Festival de Artes Multimédia "Abertura", New Media Center "O Século", Lisbon, Portugal.
2008 "Zone Time I" Audiovisual Real-Time Performance, New Media Center "O Século", Lisbon, Portugal.
2008 "World One Minutes Exhibition", Today Art Museum, Beijing, China.
2007 Two experimental videos presented in Virtual Museum, Zuidas Project, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2003 "Eternal Foreigner" participates in "Parasite Paradise", a collective multidisciplinary art exhibition, Utrecht, The Netherlands.
2001 "O Mar", video-installation at Overtoom 301, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
1998 Collective Photo Exhibiton at the Amsterdam Center for Photography, The Netherlands.
1996 Collective Photo Exhibition with "Associação Animal" in Fábrica da Triunfo, Coimbra, Portugal.
1995 Collective Photo Exhibiton with "Associação Animal", Coimbra, Portugal.
1995 Collective Photo Exhibition with CEF (Center for Photography Studies), Coimbra, Portugal.

Film, Video and New Media Festivals

2012 "Siesta" is shown at Oslo Screen Festival, Norway.
2011 "Integrated Circuit" shown at Tribute to Pedro Hestnes, Video System: Obedience, Cinema Nimas, Lisbon, Portugal.
2010 "GMT minus 5" shown at Fuso Videoart International, Berardo Museum, Belém Cultural Centre,

Lisbon, Portugal.
2009 "Integrated Circuit" shown in "Dutch Shorts" at International Amsterdam Film Festival, De Balie, The Netherlands.
2009 Film selection shown at "Black Magic Woman Festival", Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2009 "GMT minus 5" shown at Media Art Festival Friesland, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands.
2008 "Callas" is shown in the Lumen Eclipse Festival, Havard Square, Cambridge, United States.
2008 "Callas" and "(Too Many) Lights are shown in presentation of the Portuguese Video Art Archive at Fábrica features, Lisbon, Portugal.
2008 "Errata" participates in Documente Videolab, Livraria Gato Vadio, Oporto, Portugal.
2008 "(Too Many) Lights" participates in Festival Electrochoc 3, Rhône-Alpes, France.
2007 "Callas" participates in 4th Fair of Culture, Zagreb University, Croatia.
2007 "Callas" participates in Festival do Minuto, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
2007 "Callas" participates in The One Minutes Awards in Ghent, Belgium.
2007 "Callas" is shown at Media Art Festival Friesland, The Netherlands.
2007 "Bênção" and "Siesta" participate in Videolab Festival, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
2006 "Bênção" participates in Caminhos do Cinema Português Film Festival, Coimbra, Portugal.
2006 "(Too many) lights" and "Siesta" participate in VideoLab Festival, Coimbra, Portugal.
2006 "Bênção" participates in Primeira Mostra de Curtas do Seixal Film Festival, Portugal.
2005 "Bênção" participates in "Novos Olhares" Film Festival, Chapitô, Lisbon, Portugal.
2003 "A Descoberta" participates in Grote Markt Film Festival, The Hague, The Netherlands.
2002 "A Descoberta" participates in PEK Film Festival, Filmstad, in The Hague Film Museum, The Netherlands.

Communications
2013 "Film-Philosophy Conference", Amsterdam University Theater, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2013 "NECS Conference – Media Politics, Political Media", Charles University Prague, Czech Republic.
2013 "MIT8 – Public Media Private Media" Conference, Boston, US.
2012 "Passages Conference", organized with the Sorbonne, Doclisboa Film Festival, Lisbon, Portugal.
2012 "Investigations II – Nuts and Bolts of a PhD in the Arts", Symposium about Artistic Research, Gerrit Rietveld Academy, The Netherlands.
2012 "NECS Conference - Time Networks: Screen media and memory", Lisbon, Portugal.
2009 "Biopolitics, Ethics, and Subjectivation: Questions on Modernity" conference, Hsinchu University, Taiwan.
2008 "Encontros de Viana" Film Festival, Viana do Castelo, Portugal.
2007 "Festival do Minuto", São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
2007 Luso-Brazilian Congress "Politics, Culture and the Arts", Oporto University, Portugal.
2002 Participation in public debate "Documentary Today" together with documentary directors and producers, The Shan Foundation, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Lecturing and Collaborations
2013 to date – Member of Research Group "Artistic Research", Faculty of the Humanities, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2012 to date – Tutor of the ART and RESEARCH Honours Programme - Gerrit Rietveld Academy/University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2011 to date – Member of "Making Things Public" PhD in Artistic Research Group, Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2009 – 2012 - Lecturer in Film History and Theory and Thesis Supervisor of the BA with Honours Degree in Digital Filmmaking at the SAE Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
Since 2007 – Founding member of the Cultural Association "Inventário – arte, acção e pensamento" (Inventory – art, action and thought), Portugal.
2007 – 2011 - Member of "Aesthetics, Politics and Art" Research Group, Philosophy Institute, Oporto University, Portugal.

Grants and subsidies
2012-2016 PhD in Artistic Research Grant from the Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation.
2008 Fine Arts Department of The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation funds "The One Minutes Workshop" and the "World One Minutes Expo", Lisbon, Portugal.
2007 Fine Arts Department of The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation funds "The One Minutes Workshop", Lisbon, Portugal.

2003 Hivos supports "Trading Lives" exhibition organized together with Transnational Institute and Carbon Trade Watch, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2003 MamaCash supports the film "Eternal Foreigner", Goa, India.
2001-2002 European Commission grant "Future Capital" for the documentary BAH, Madrid, Spain.
1999-2000 European Commission grant for editing cross-culture and multidisciplinary newsletter at NGO EYFA – European Youth for Action – Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Publications
2014 (upcoming) "Webcams as Emerging Cinematic Medium" in Spring issue "Traces" of NECSUS online journal, Amsterdam University Press.
2013 "Carnal Aesthetics" - my films "GMT minus 5" and "Split Recognition" are part of the Artistic Corpus of the article "Art as Circuit Breaker: Surveillance Screens and Powers of Affect" by Prof dr Patricia Pisters, I.B. Tauris, New York, US.
2009 Programa de Criatividade e Criação Artística, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal.
2008 World One Minutes Exhibition Catalog, The Netherlands.
2005 Novos Olhares Film Festival, Chapitô, Lisbon, Portugal.
2002 PEK Film Festival, The Hague, The Netherlands.

Education
2011 to date – PhD Candidate at the University of Amsterdam in collaboration with the Gerrit Rietveld Academy: Promotor – Prof dr Patricia Pisters, Co-Promotor – dr Jeroen Boomgaard.
2008-2010 Master of Fine Arts Degree at the Sandberg Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
2005 Film Directing Course, The London Film School with Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, Portugal.
1999-2003 Visual Arts BA at the AudioVisual Department, Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
1993-1998 University Degree in Journalism, Coimbra, Portugal.

Other Courses
1997 Advanced Photography with Wanda Michalak, Amsterdam Center for Photography, The Netherlands.
1995 Film History and Aesthetics, Coimbra University, Portugal.
1994 Photography Course with Álvaro Rosendo in CEF, Coimbra Center for Photography Studies, Portugal.

TV Broadcast
2009 Interviewed as coordinator of Portuguese One Minutes for "Fotograma" TV programme about Portuguese Cinema, RTP, Portugal.
2003 "A Descoberta" is shown in TART, TV program about experimental filmmaking, VPRO Televisie, The Netherlands.