Frances Hegarty & Andrew Stones

EXTRA (+)

Site-specific live/recorded video projection for Glydegate Square Bradford

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Jeanine Griffin

In the 1950s Bradford-born J. B. Priestly briefly considered the new technology of television as a conduit for conjuring the dead and the uncanny. In his story *Uncle Phil on TV* a family is haunted by the image of a recently deceased relative on the screen. It seems that the live-ness of television (rather than the photographic illusion of film) could be perceived as uncanny, eliciting a feeling of 'taking part' in a broadcast programme, whilst expecting that televised persons might step out of the screen. In effect, the new medium heralds the imaginative creation of an 'ambiguous interactive zone'[1] inhabited by real and electronic subjects. Like Priestly's story, the video work *Extra,* made by Frances Hegarty & Andrew Stones for Bradford's Glydegate Square, brings to the fore the ambiguities of live and mediated space and time, opening a meeting place for real and visible (but incorporeal) people in the interstitial space of the screen.

Since 1997 Hegarty & Stones have worked in collaboration on projects which present the specifics of place alongside manipulations of time; comparing the duration of recording with that of reception; memory with perception. *Orienteer (A to Z, Dawn to Dusk)* [2000], creates a false duration for a run across Birmingham of some 15-20 miles, based on an alphabetical list of streets chosen from an A to Z street directory. Beginning at dawn on Alexandria Road and ending at dusk on Zion's Close, the run constitutes a conspicuous female intervention into the objectively abstract project of mapping a city. The distancing, analytical overview of the city plan has been likened to the gaze, but here any voyeurism is drawn down to a prominent and unswerving female orienteer as she incidentally maps the terrain of the city around her, irrespective of its usual social and cultural boundaries.

Overnight Sensation [2001] is based on the 24-hour lifespan of a Belfast market. Despite emanating from the omniscient viewpoint of an elevated stop-frame camera, the daily social and commercial use of the particular space is privileged over its abstract representation. The choice of a working market as site and subject of the work aligns with Lefebvre's idea of representational spaces: the lived and experienced spaces of everyday activity would historically be predominantly 'female', unlike the more open spaces of the plaza or agora. A gendered identity for this particular space is suggested especially by a matriarchal market trader whose stall fills the foreground of the image, and the brief but rooted appearance of a nun - two figures who remained relatively static long enough for the time-lapse process

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Extra installation view, Glydegate Square 2003

to register their sustained presence. In its compression of time *Overnight Sensation* suggests a frenetic construction of social space, offset by a surreal overnight period bereft of normal activity. This dream-like night is filled by uncanny, rushing cloud, from which people reappear to revitalise the hall.

For Dublin [1997] presents excerpts from Molly Bloom's monologue in James Joyce's *Ulysses* as bright pink neon texts on the facades of various Dublin buildings and landmarks. In the book, Molly's stream of consciousness is a kind of mental flaneury projected from her bed, as distinct from the thoughts of the male characters which unfold as they physically traverse the city of Dublin. Casting aspects of this modernist literary representation of female subjectivity onto the city's architecture, *For Dublin* uses Molly's words to question the nature of civic heritage and commemoration: *…a stranger to Dublin what a place was it and so on about the monuments and he tired me out with statues…*

The live/recorded video work *Seemingly So Evidently Not Apparently Then* [1998], presented within an antiquated railway station waiting room, melds the real time CCTV surveillance of a commuter platform with a video recording of an eight hour performance which has taken place in the same site. The figure of a solitary woman in exaggerated Victorian costume is layered with the live image of commuters on the platform - a digital spectre from the past infiltrating a public space which can usually, confidently, be characterised as belonging to the contemporary traveller. As the title suggests, the work calls into question the viewer's certainty about presence and absence, and the veracity of the time and space in which they find themselves.

A similar technique is used in *Extra*. The window of a purpose-built structure in a public square serves as a screen for a projected mirror image of the immediate vicinity. In the image people gradually assemble and stand as if awaiting a curtain call, often looking directly and expectantly upwards into the camera. A visitor approaching the screen window triggers a pair of halogen floodlights, illuminating themselves and their immediate surroundings. They are made visible to the same camera which captured the crowd of 'extras' and flipped into the projected image in a classic trope of being sucked into the screen[2], seeing their own image, mirrored, among the crowd, looking out.

A spectator has difficulty in identifying with the viewpoint of the camera whilst being held simultaneously in its gaze. Both live and recorded layers of the projected image are translucent, ghosted, and a certain vertigo and dislocation is created in switching between an authentic and a mediated reality. Uncertainty is cast on the persons and events occupying the live space - for clearly these do not include the ghostly figures sharing the screen. In these effects *Extra* recalls the phenomenological switchings of films like *The Others* [2001] and *The Sixth Sense* [1999]: questioning present and past, real and unreal, actual and absent. At times in *Extra* the pre-recorded protagonists hang back, granting the whole frame to the live visitor; sometimes they crowd the scene, and spectators can find themselves coexisting with the 'unreal' occupants of the square, sharing space with a spectral other. The extras repeatedly disperse or fade, and in an echo of the cinematic 'wipe' a male figure appears to clear the screen/window in readiness for the next scene, or the restarting of the cycle.

When they first enter the frame, the physical appearance of the pre-recorded extras is distorted and augmented by an 'aurora borealis' of exaggerated light and colour, which gradually clears to reveal recognisable characters: local reporters, policemen, doctors, children, TV presenters, sportspeople (some of these are moderately famous, others not; all took part in a four hour video shoot several months prior to the post-production phase of the work). These effects of light and colour distinguish the two time frames at work in *Extra*, drawing attention to the way film often fuses the past-ness of recorded events with the present-ness of its projected spectacle, to create a single 'crystal-image'[3].

Extra originates not on film, however, but with the more ubiquitous technologies of CCTV and digital video. Any photographic medium raises the risk of objectifying its subjects, a risk more extreme in the case of CCTV, whose subjects are usually unaware of being watched. Nicolas Bourriaud sees the prevalence of video, CCTV and multimedia systems as ushering in the transition from the society of the spectacle to the society of the extra where *'everyone sees themselves summoned to be famous for 15 minutes, using a TV game, street poll or news item as go between… we are summoned to turn into extras of the spectacle, having been regarded as its consumers… after the consumer society, we can see the dawning of the society of extras where the individual develops as a part time stand-in for freedom, signer and sealer of the public place…'*[4]

For Roland Barthes the photographic image marks the moment when *'I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro version of death… I am truly becoming a spectre'*[5]. *Extra* dematerialises its subjects, literally 'ghosting' them in the process of representation and evoking a pressing sense of mortality. In so doing the work evokes the 19th century practice whereby charlatan mediums conjured spirits via the Pepper's Ghost optical illusion, and forms of 'spirit photography' in which live portrait subjects were surrounded by double-exposed spirits (actually termed 'extras') who were not visible to them during the sitting. In *Extra*, the duped sitter is replaced by subjects who look directly into a CCTV camera: knowing actors within a normally covert process. Ghosting effects

are inflicted equally on pre-recorded and live performers, where each is 'extra' to the other, incidentally levelling the traditional hierarchies of commercial film - between star and extra, viewer and viewed.

Films, like statues, mostly feature famous people and fixed narratives. *Extra* is sited in a public square closely associated with the nearby monumental statues of J.B. Priestly and Queen Victoria, but in contrast commemorates the not-so-famous, in a narrative left open to public intervention. The work connects issues raised by city centre surveillance and the inhabitation and construction of public space. Vito Acconci notes:

'An open public space, like the piazza, is a vast multidirectional space. People are dots sprinkled across the floor… here and there, as if scattered through a sea, dots merge together into islands… in order for public space to be a gathering place, where people are gathered together as a public, it needs a gathering point. To be seen and read as a public, to act and/or be used as a public, the dots have to form a circle, as if around a point; or they have to form a line as if towards a point; or they have to blend together so that they form a point themselves, which blots and spreads out to cover the piazza floor' [6]

This gathering, blending and coalescing happens in *Extra*. The democratic sense of depth of field facilitated by the static live camera allows viewers to engage with whatever elements they like within the projected image, simply by physically occupying and moving about the surveyed part of the square. *Extra* creates the ambiguous interactive zone, allowing real and virtual people to cohere, imaginatively (and accidentally) constructing the space they inhabit, in an anonymous nightly interaction; an ongoing narrative.

Notes:
1. Quoted in Jeffrey Sconce *Haunted Media* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000)
2. The screen is seen as a permeable membrane in films from Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Junior* to Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo.*
3. Gilles Deleuze *Cinema 2: The Time Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989) p. 81. The crystal image is a shot that aligns the virtual image - subjective, in the past, recollected; and the actual image - objective, in the present, perceived.
4. Nicolas Bourriaud *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Reel, 2002) p. 113
5. Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 1993) p. 14
6. Vito Acconci *Public Space Private Time* in *Art and the Public Sphere,* ed. W J T Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) p163.

Above: *Extra* still frames from video edit 2003
Left: *Extra* installation view, Glydegate Square 2003