

## *Global Art Atelier*

Tuesday 18th November 2008

Chris Hales

My final full day in Lisbon, centred around my Global Art performance at 15.00 in the Pantheon. Two projectors were set up pointing at a white screen directly under the organ at one end of the Pantheon's central hall, each projector being connected to a laptop positioned on top of a huge marble table/altar. The two images were aligned to form a diptych. In terms of visitors the Pantheon was quiet, but Carlos played the organ and Nuno made vocal sounds, sometimes with help from new assistant Tania, in order to control the video playback (some gentle ambient sounds were played from the computer). The new dimension of "live grab" functioned well, although lighting conditions meant the image was a bit dark and in the end the 'night shot' function was used for one of the cameras – see the photos below. The principle of the "live grab" was that 10 seconds of video was grabbed by the program whilst a still image was displayed, and immediately afterwards this video was displayed and treated just like all the other prerecorded material.



PS As this is the last entry I would like to emphasise the friendliness, support and help of Carlos and Nuno, as well as Graca and Gabriel Garcia and many other friendly people who contributed to my creative and enjoyable stay here!



## *Global Art Atelier*

Monday 17th November 2008

Chris Hales

I worked today on an early visualisation of my 'neverending stairs' project in order to see whether the footage that I've made will be sufficient for me to carry on work with the project during December.



Taking the always-wise advice of Carlos, I saved further work on this project for now, since it can be shown in January. Instead I worked further on the Reactive Portraits, adding new scenes from footage filmed during my stay, trying to include a totally new aspect of 'live' video footage, and copying and testing the project on both my laptops in the hope for a dual projection setup at the Pantheon tomorrow.

## ***Global Art Atelier***

Sunday 16th November 2008

Chris Hales

Both the projections were in my view successful. Some images from the scenes are shown below. Also included were some scenes filmed by Carlos at a previous event with a dance troupe performing in the railway station. Even day to day activities such as Carlos lighting his pipe acquired an interesting aspect when the action moved forwards and backwards in the curious erratic manner caused by the microphone-controlling system. Some scenes worked better than others and the experience from this will serve well for any future performances such as that coming up on the 18<sup>th</sup>.



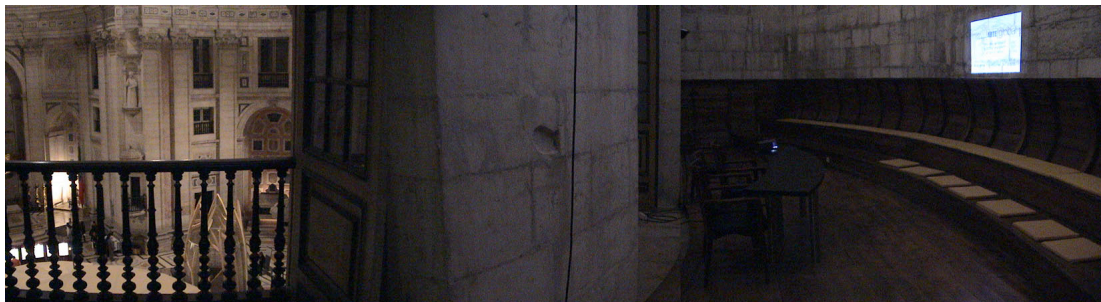


## *Global Art Atelier*

Saturday 15th November 2008

Chris Hales

Two interactive screenings today. In the afternoon it was the first tryout of the 'reactive portraits' in an upper room of the Pantheon during the opening of the Césariny exhibition. The picture below shows the set up, the video image is projected into the room and the microphone is dangling into the open space of the central Pantheon hall. Being a busy event, there was plenty of noise echoing in the hall, which triggered the microphone threshold successfully (and in an irregular manner) and consequently manipulated the video sequences to play forwards and backwards.



The system performed well and produced some quite striking imagery. There was something quite fascinating and unnatural about the manner in which the gestures of people captured in the videos would repeat hesitatingly.

Most of the videos shown in the Pantheon related to the Global Art event itself – for example, materials shot in the Perver Gallery or the Pantheon during the setting up of the Freedom Shelter. For the evening show in the Lux Fragil nightclub I prepared material that was slightly more accessible and recognisable, given the type of audience that I imagined would be there, and included some footage taken during the summer because visually it would suit the concept. At the club, video imagery was projected onto 3 screens surrounding a lounge-type area, with the microphone hanging down from the upper-level DJ booth into the lounge area. As the room filled up with people the DJ increased the volume of the music regularly, and I had to then run upstairs to the DJ booth to increase the threshold level. I ran my sequence of material through twice, all in all the projection lasted for about 90 minutes.



## ***Global Art Atelier***

Friday 14th November 2008

Chris Hales

I sat down at my computer and, using Director, created a prototype of my display “engine” to try out on Saturday in the Pantheon. Audio is picked up by a microphone and when it exceeds a certain level, a Quicktime video plays forward in the normal manner – but when the audio drops below the threshold level, the video starts to play in reverse.

The very first version did not play well, because of the way that various codecs use ‘key frames’ (the Quicktime movies do not play smoothly in reverse) and it took some experimentation to find that the ‘Photo-JPEG’ codec gave the smoothest results. Further experimentation was then needed to get the timings right, to avoid a kind of flickering result, but once the system was working the results were impressive.

I then started to go through all my digitised video scenes to identify those most appropriate to the concept – mostly scenes of people making movements and gestures. Hence the name of “Reactive Portraits”. I also filmed some more video scenes, specifically with this idea in mind.

## ***Global Art Atelier***

Thursday 13th November 2008

Chris Hales

An “engine” is a term used quite curiously in the interactive video field to denote some kind of custom written software with a specific function but which can be reloaded with variable data sets: in this particular case, sets of video scenes. When I visited the MIT Medialab’s ‘Interactive Cinema’ department in the mid-90s the term was in very popular use there, and an example of such a system was ‘Contour’ (a sophisticated system allowing users to configure and view documentary materials) which would accept any folder of Quicktime movies accompanied by a special text file - written in a specific way and which provided details of each of the Quicktime movies in the folder.

I have never used “engines” in my work, for the reason that each completed interactive film is a unique piece, with its structure and interactivity specific to the message or narrative that it communicates. Using ‘Director’ as the authoring tool does make it easy, however, simply to replace one Quicktime movie by another one with the identical name. Without any reprogramming, the Director application will run as previously but displaying the replaced Quicktime movie instead – I have used this technique to quickly customise sections (such as the ending) of a film such as ‘Crescendo’ when it is shown to audiences in different cities. During the summer I filmed outside the National Gallery in Prague (where my work was shown as part of the Triennale of Contemporary Art) and was almost immediately able to insert a localised ending sequence to ‘Crescendo’.



For the Global Art Atelier, it may be that my proposed project to show at the Pantheon might evolve into some kind of “engine” which would in future be used in a variety of situations and with a variety of video scenes...

## ***Global Art Atelier***

Wednesday 12th November 2008

Chris Hales

I was away from Portugal today, making a presentation about my work. Making such a presentation is always a way for me – as well as the audience of course - to learn more about my own work, because almost every time a new thought or connection or clarification comes to mind whilst attempting to make a coherent presentation. Unfortunately, there is never time for me to stop the talk and make notes about the interesting thing (i.e. interesting to myself) that I just said!

Whilst showing 'The Twelve Loveliest Things I Know', I remarked to the audience that the video imagery had faded and it used to look more colourful. Such a curious concept, that a digital artefact can fade like an old Super8 cine film! I remember the original analogue Hi8 footage having wonderful colour, and using an expensive plug-in board to make the digitisation. The original version of the film displayed footage streaming directly from the board, but later as the board became obsolete I transcoded the files to Quicktime using the highest settings of the 'Cinepak' codec. Each codec throws away some information, and colour saturation and contrast often become compromised. Recently, I had to re-encode the Cinepak files to a newer codec since some versions of Quicktime seemed to no longer support it. So my colourful film has faded over time! An MIT Medialab student of Interactive Cinema, Arjan Schutte, once wrote an interesting thesis on the subject of 'Digital Patina', looking at ways that a history of usage could be reflected in the visual aspect of a digital object.



## *Global Art Atelier*

Tuesday 11th November 2008

Chris Hales

Sitting eating in the Taberna dos Clericos, whilst looking for money in my pockets I pulled out my handmade 'business' card, with the following image:



This is in fact a composite image, made from five stills (the five horizontal 'strips') from my first proper interactive film, 'The Twelve Loveliest Things I Know'. Four of the five stills are splitscreen (better described as multiscreen images) images - the central still is in fact made of three component parts.

Looking anew at the images I could really see how the juxtaposing of imagery in this way resembled the 'cadavre exquis', popular with the Surrealists, that Carlos has mentioned several times - I saw an example on the wall of the Perve Galleria. Stylistically I can see how it would look, but the big difference is that my imagery was deliberately chosen by myself, whereas the cadavre exquis is a communal drawing/creative technique, often with little visual clues left by one contributor to stimulate the imagination of the next. How to create something like that, when dealing with digital imagery...?

## ***Global Art Atelier***

Monday 10th November 2008

Chris Hales

Some filming today, setting up the tripod at the top of some of the steep stairways of Alfama, waiting for a quiet moment, pressing RECORD, running to the bottom of the stairs and then running up again. Great in theory, but it takes forever for the quiet moment to arrive – the streets are so full of life. Then, once I start running up the stairs, just at the wrong moment an old lady or some kids or map-carrying tourists always seem to appear from nowhere. It takes a long time just to successfully film even a few seconds of video.

The second problem is to match the perspective of the 'impossible stairs'. Although I will have the advantage of post-production using After Effects, there is a clever perspective trick in the way the stairs are drawn that needs to be emulated very closely for the effect to 'work'. But ... well, let's see ... maybe the wonders of After Effects will solve everything.

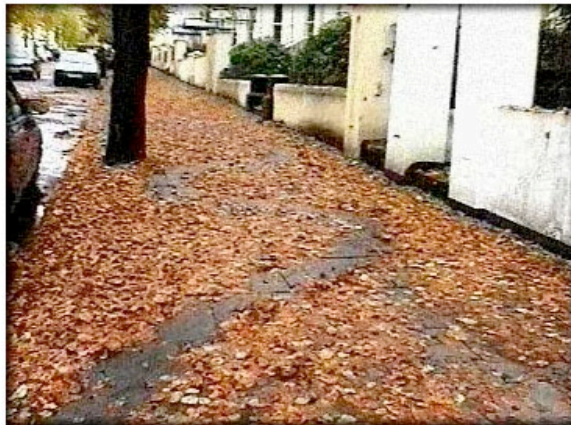
This will need to be made as a multiscreen film, with the component screens carefully matched visually so they make a whole. Of course, the film needs to have the possibility of being affected by an audience – possibly, for example, the runner/artist (i.e. me) needs 'encouragement' from the viewers to keep running, otherwise he cannot continue his journey. This would relate to the artist needing 'approval' from the public in order to keep making work...

## ***Global Art Atelier***

Sunday 9th November 2008

Chris Hales

It is always an interesting experience to try to explain what is (or could be) interactive videoart to other people from all walks of life. Explaining the idea of being able to change what is represented onscreen through some kind of activity seems so easy to grasp, yet I find myself so often struggling to explain the concept when asked what it is that I'm making. The majority of people seem to have a vague idea that an interactive movie might be based on 'changing the what happens next in the plot' but seem to believe that the whole thing is either totally esoteric or highly advanced technically. Even when I run classes to students studying closely related disciplines, and I ask whether anyone has actually seen an interactive movie, rarely do I get an affirmative answer. Trying to explain that an interactive videoartwork does not have to follow a typical 'Hollywood' plot, and might in fact be more like a landscape painting or a portrait that changes, seems one step too far for many people to understand. One reason for this is that such objects are not typically seen on a day-to-day basis. In fact, once many people actually experience such an interactive piece, the way it functions becomes clear almost immediately: an interactive picture definitely tells a thousand words!





## ***Global Art Atelier***

8th November 2008

Chris Hales

Thinking today of possible 'works-in-progress' to present on the 15<sup>th</sup>, revisiting the thoughts from 6<sup>th</sup> November. There is an amazing echo in the Panteao, noise resounds in there. It would be interesting to dangle a microphone into the void and let it control a projected videofilm. Noise echoing in the Panteao would make the film react in some way, this needs some experimentation but –for example- louder noises would play the video forwards, and quietness would make the video go backwards. It would give an interesting visual effect, especially if the video sequences were video portraits (short performances or actions made by various people) or even some of the event-documentation that I've been filming from day to day. The interactive film would operate automatically in the background, would not demand active action from the audience - yet exactly what is shown would be unpredictable.

This would work really well in the Lux club – the beat of the music would make the video portraits appear to react to each song differently.

Once a basic system has been developed it could operate with any selection of video sequences, and experimentation could be carried out with the exact manner in which the video sequences react. This is my typical approach, reflexive and iterative – make half an idea and test it out...

## *Global Art Atelier*

7th November 2008

Chris Hales

Today we got interested in experimental films which explore narrative and in which a particular location is featured. I guess this is partly relevant because of the architectural connections to Pancho Guedes and the surreal oeuvre of Cesariny.

We looked at Maya Deren's classic "Meshes of the Afternoon", clearly there was a lot of fun during the making of the film but it certainly has a very well thought out structure – however confusing it might seem at first sight. Only the short scenes of Maya Deren striding across the landscape might be called surreal in the context of the rest of the film - which otherwise takes place in and around a particular house and which has a certain sense of logic.



I then remembered a film I once saw, made by Man Ray in 1929 entitled "Les Mystères du Château du Dé". It seems like he was invited to stay in a large villa with interesting architecture and again had great fun making a film – which turned out very surreal. This again raised the issue in my mind of whether surreal cuts and edits could be used as the central 'feature' in an interactive film. On the one hand, the cut scenes might be so disparate that they show no apparent logic to a viewer who interacts, and therefore confusion might arise, but on the other hand so long as the film changes surely the viewer will realise they have done something. This really could be something to explore in this particular workshop, where we are inspired by the memory of Cesariny.

## *Global Art Atelier*

6th November 2008

Chris Hales

Looking through some of Carlos' archive of audiovisual materials reminds me how difficult it can be to add interactivity to a collection of assets not specifically made with interaction in mind. All my own works are filmed specifically with the end result already thought about, and are often filmed in a specific visual way so that the interaction becomes an integral part of the whole: 'movie as interface'. With a generalised collection of materials, one can form categories and links between individual items but the exercise usually becomes an analytical rather than an aesthetic one. Flair loses out to graft.



I had the idea of a two-screen installation. On the first screen (it could be a monitor placed on a stand), I might show a looping interview with Carlos in which I'd ask him to talk about Global Art - he is certainly a free-flowing type of speaker. I'd place a microphone, clearly evident, in front of the monitor so that it picks up the sound of Carlos' voice, and the microphone connects to a computer which projects onto the second screen. Whenever Carlos speaks, documentary imagery gathered from my time here is shown on the second screen. If he pauses, the videos pause and eventually stop until such a time as he talks again.

In fact, it could be anybody's voice...



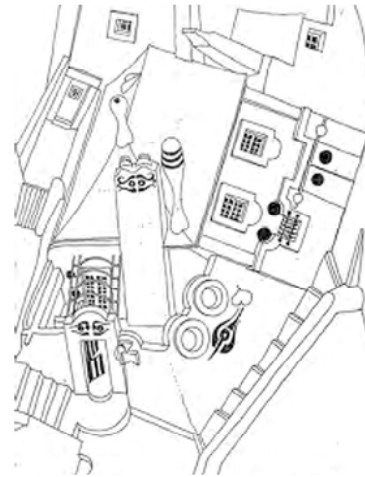
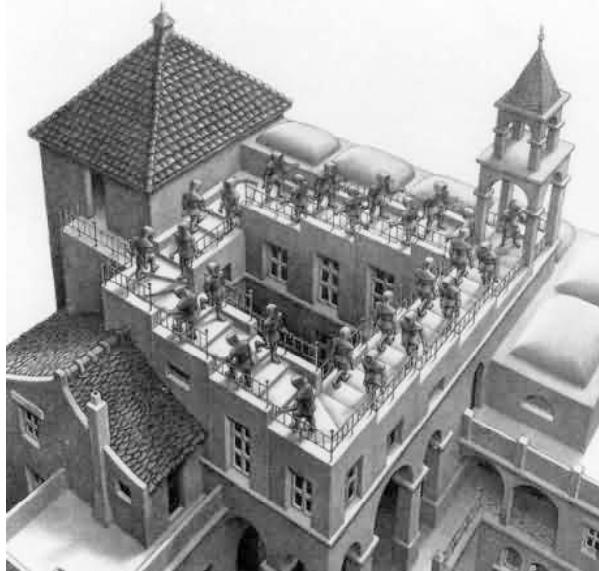
## *Global Art Atelier*

5th November 2008

Chris Hales

Today the thinking process of the Global Art workshop really started in situ - in Alfama to be precise.

So many steep stairways, everything in an irregular pattern, a vista on every street. An idea came to mind immediately, referring back to some filming I did in the summer, and now thinking of Escher's drawing of the impossible stairs (picture, left) and Pancho Guedes' distorted representation of the Eye House (picture, right): to film myself running up many of the narrow stairways, then to use post-production to create a never-ending climb - the artist always chasing something but never finding it. Perhaps the audience must interact to keep the artist climbing...and while he climbs forever, videos of memories, impressions, thoughts appear in the central area of the stairs.



For me the role and nature of the interactivity is the crucial ingredient in creating an interactive artwork. Normally this presupposes that there has to be some activity from the audience or performer. Ironically, the police once suspected Cesariny of 'doing nothing'...