



Seance

By Jemila Abdulai

Time as perceived by non-humans.

https://youtu.be/bOKF_RA-zes?si=UPEd56Xf9ixHQ6jj

Introduction

Seance is a computational video work that explores time as perceived by non-human entities. The project uses archived CCTV footage, manipulated through p5.js code accompanied by an unsettling, trancelike low-frequency droning sound track, to investigate how time can be captured, distorted, and re-experienced beyond a human perspective. By reanimating pieces of the past and presenting them as an immersive audiovisual experience, *Seance* invites the audience to reflect on the concept of infinity, and the act of witnessing time that has already passed yet continues to exist through digital archives.

Concept and Background Research

I view collecting video footage as creating “time capsules” because they keep track of the passing of time and our experience of the world around us. They immortalise time into a format that can be accessed infinitely; to be replayed, stitched, and manipulated in order to distort reality.

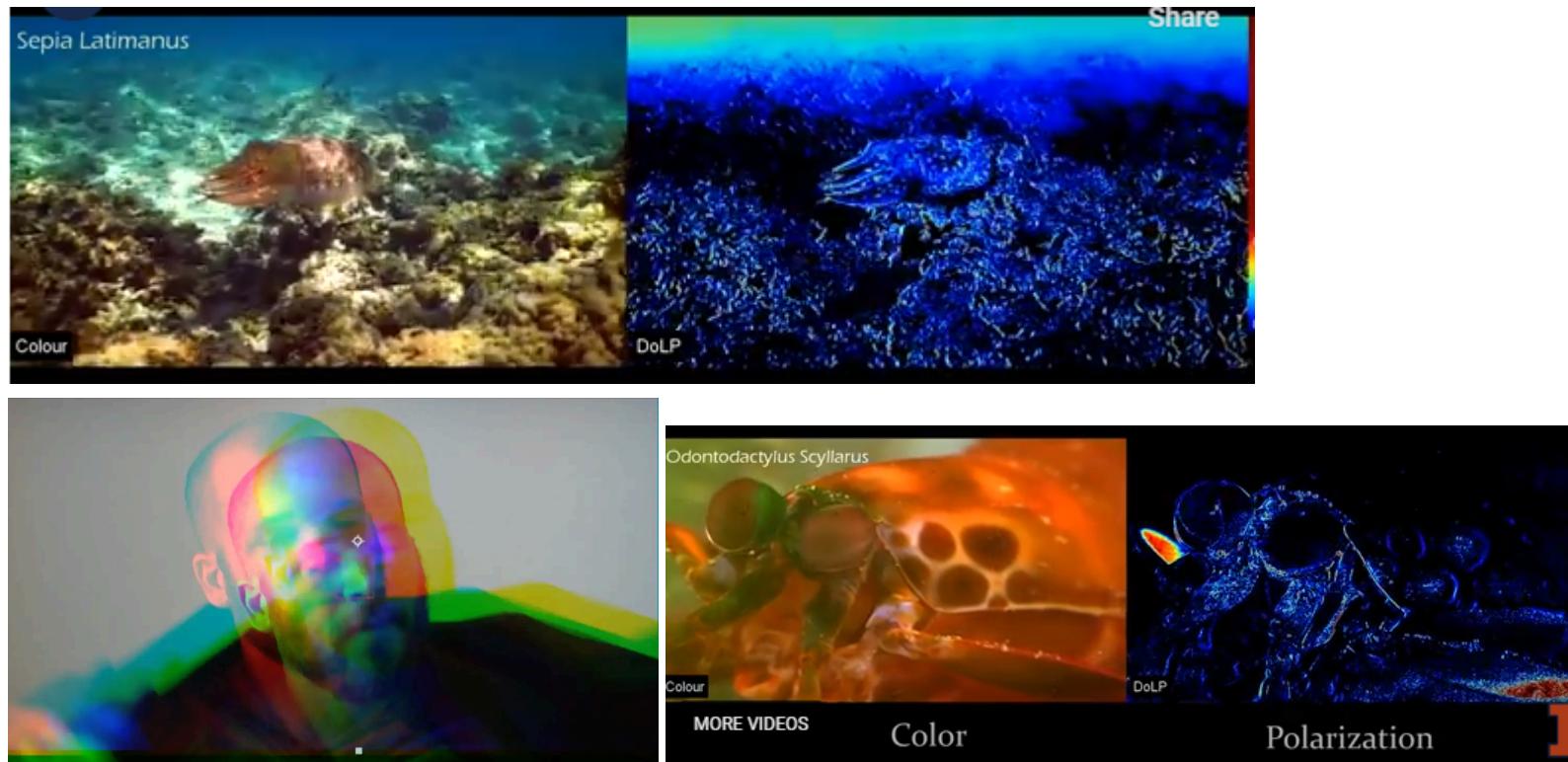
I am interested in using this medium to attempt to capture the experience of time, the past and infinity - through a non-human lens. The chosen timescale for this work is infinity, represented through continuously looping archival footage that has no fixed beginning or end.

My practice currently surrounds the idea of decentering the human, and I want to explore the differences in the realities we experience as humans coexisting with non-human entities in the same physical space. CCTV cameras are a particularly interesting subject to me in this context, as they operate continuously, without intention or personal memory, recording moments indiscriminately and without emotional bias.

My interest in non-human perception was influenced by research into mantis shrimp vision, which demonstrates that other species experience reality in ways humans cannot. Mantis shrimp can see wavelengths of polarised light and colour that are invisible to us, suggesting that perception is not universal. This idea informed the visual elements of the work, where distortion is used to imagine how time and the world might appear through a non-human lens.

By re-imagining mundane moments of life that we have experienced through a different lens, this work allows the audience to reanimate the past and re-experience it through the eyes of a different being. It draws attention to the passing of time and makes it possible to re-examine it, by looking for similarities and differences that add new meaning to our perception of the world. The video footage represents the past as it becomes frozen in time, unable to be changed. I wanted to play with the idea of “changing the unchangeable” by viewing it through a different lens.

The title *Seance* was chosen because for me, the word invokes the idea of calling back things from the dead or the past and potentially giving them new life. I think of these archived videos as what makes up our collective “past.” By manipulating and distorting them, they take on a new meaning and a new life. The work itself attempts to imagine alternative ways of sensing and understanding time beyond human experience.

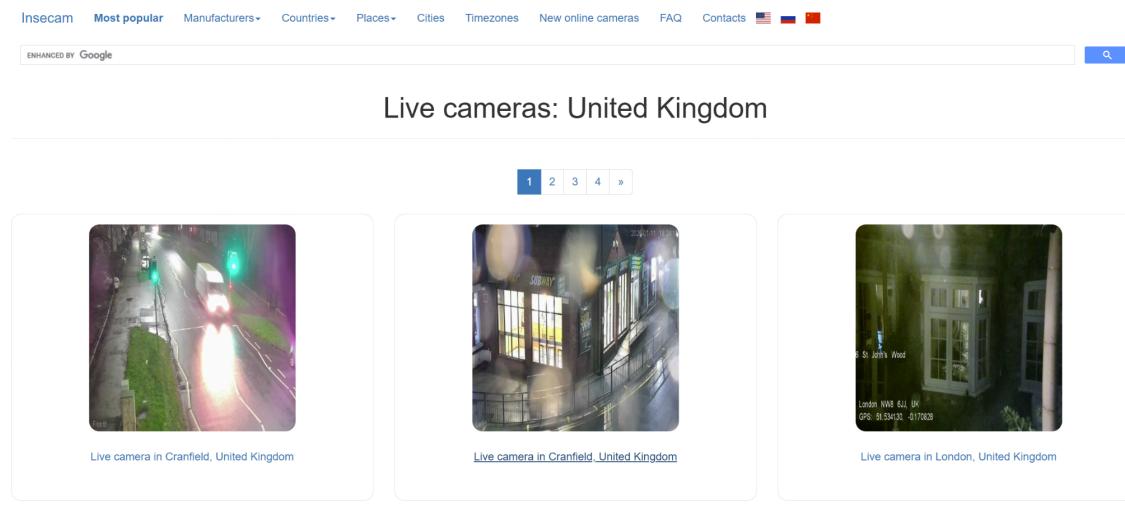


Technical Implementation

I collected the CCTV footage myself from open source, publicly available CCTV data online over the course of a week. I selected clips from different locations across London and the UK, focusing on scenes that appeared visually mundane but often contained shared human experiences, such as streets, beaches, and public walkways. These spaces are constantly changing, yet the footage captures them in a state of continuous repetition.

Then using the various code references I found online, I wrote code in p5.js that simulated the polarised visual effect I was aiming for and passed the collected videos into the p5 sketch. The code processes the video frames by altering the contrast and colour values to create a sense of abstraction, visual and temporal distortion. I tried to keep the code fairly simple so that the visual effects felt deliberate rather than decorative.

The work is designed to be displayed on a full-size projector with speakers in a darkened physical space to create a more immersive experience. The scale of the projection encourages the viewer to feel enveloped by the footage rather than observing it passively on a small screen, to make them imagine living the experience themselves. The soundtrack (which I compiled myself using copyright free sounds) contains low-frequency droning sounds that are more intended to produce physical vibrations than audible sound. The sound design plays a crucial role in conveying the experience of infinity that the project aims to evoke. The slow, repetitive rhythm of the audio mirrors the looping nature of the visuals, and reinforces the idea of cyclical and non-linear time.



p5.js

File ▾ Edit ▾ Sketch ▾ Help ▾ English ▾

Auto-refresh Pine guilty

Sketch Files + sketch.js Saved: 25 seconds ago

Hello, abdulajemila! ▾

index.html

js sketch.js

style.css

video.mp4

video1.mp4

```
13 // Zoom
14 let zoomAmount = 1.5; // zooms into the video
15
16
17 function setup() {
18   createCanvas(windowWidth, windowHeight);
19   pixelDensity(1);
20
21   // load in video
22   video = createVideo("video1.mp4");
23   video.loop();
24   video.hide();
25   video.volume(0); // mutes the video
26
27   // load in the audio
28   song = loadSound("audio/seancesound.mp3", () => {
29     song.loop();
30     song.setVolume(0.4);
31   });
32
33   setRGBOffsets();
34 }
35
36 function draw() {
37   background(0);
38
39   let zoomedWidth = floor(video.width / zoomAmount);
40   let zoomedHeight = floor(video.height / zoomAmount);
41
42   // center the zoomed area of the video
43   let xOffset = floor((video.width - zoomedWidth) / 2);
44   let yOffset = floor((video.height - zoomedHeight) / 2);

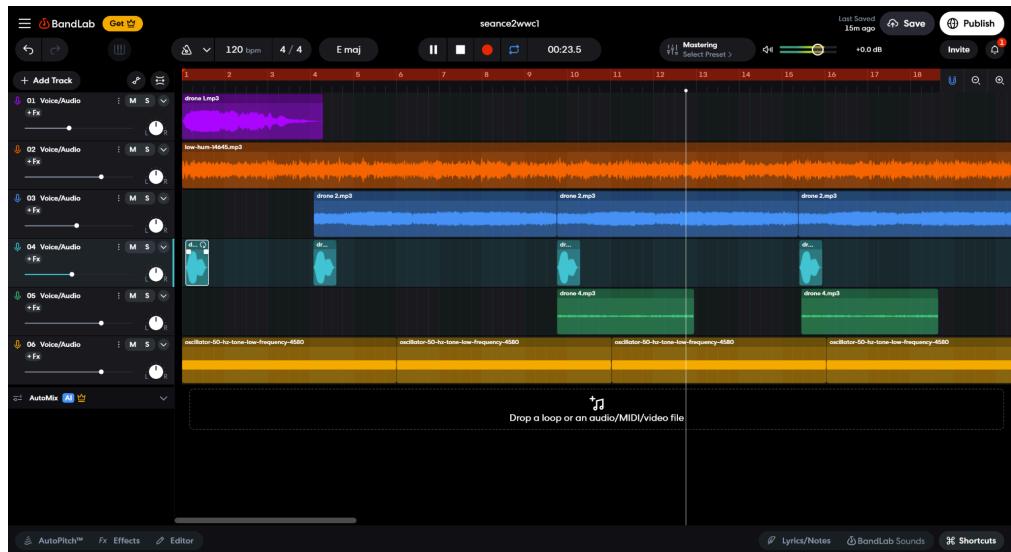
```

Preview

Public p5.js 1.11.1

Console Clear





Reflection and Future Development

I am happy with how the project turned out because I managed to keep the code fairly simple while achieving the visual and conceptual effect I wanted within the technical constraints we were given. Through this project, I learned a lot about using and manipulating video in p5.js, particularly in relation to using rgb values and manipulating pixels.

Conceptually, *Seance* helped me refine my interest in decentering the human perspective and using computational systems to explore alternative experiences of time. I think the balance between visuals, sound, and scale was successful in communicating the core idea of the work.

Potentially in the future, I could explore incorporating interactivity into the audience's experience. For example, the presence or movement of the audience could introduce some latency or further distortion to the footage, which could subtly alter the visuals in response to their real-time interactions. This could further explore the tension between real-time experience and infinity as a concept, allowing the audience's presence to affect how the past is perceived and transformed.

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