

# James Coupe

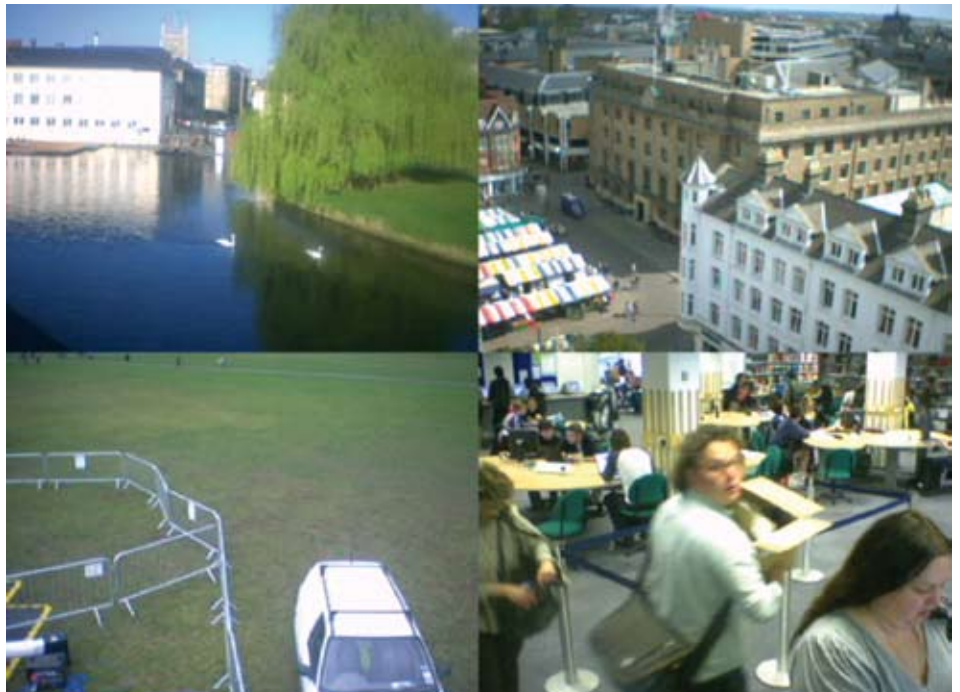
## *Putting the art in AlgoRiThm*

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James Coupe is a British artist who works with installation, electronics and digital media. After studying fine art as an undergraduate, he moved on to explore creative technology, which was when his fascination with robotics, virtual environments and telematics (information and communications technology) began. "I was working with installations and I simply wanted to make them a little more dynamic, a little more intelligent, a little more algorithmic, and so inserting into sculptural dialogue things which could move, things which could understand environmental circumstances, seemed like a natural progression."

Earlier this year he was commissioned to create an installation for Enter\_Unknown Territories, the International Festival of New Technology Art held in Cambridge. *(Re)collector* took CCTV footage from around the city and, using custom-built intelligent software, rearranged to film into a series of daily storyline narratives. Although he oversaw the project, he points out, "a lot of it was automated. Much of the process in the work was to do with having these things happen algorithmically rather than directly being controlled by me." The result was a fascinating comment on surveillance in our society, but what makes it particular interesting is that Coupe believes that if he were to recreate the work in an alternative site, the outcome would change. "With *(re)collector*, if we were to install it again in a different city or different country, it would appropriate the different characteristics of that site which would then feed back into its algorithms and potentially create movies that were more symptomatic of that community of people."

Rather than simply recreate this installation in its entirety, Coupe would like to develop this particular project further. "There have been, historically, a number of artists who have worked with cameras



and so on, but it seems like we're perhaps at a stage now, socially and technically, where we can actually do something a little more sophisticated with that phenomenon and put people in scenarios and situations through real time media where they find out something about themselves that they wouldn't ordinarily be able to see with their own eyes.... I am really interested in the idea of simultaneity, putting people in ten places at the same time, for instance, giving them a view of the city from a perspective that they would not be able to see without the work."

All of Coupe's concepts rely heavily on having the appropriate technology to enable him to explore his ideas, but he doesn't believe that his work depends solely on necessary advances in technology, it's also requires society to have the "sophistication and the cultural and social vocabulary to be able to make sense of this kind of stuff, or

at least make sense of it to a point where they have an entry to the work." It also depends on our attitudes to art — and new technology art in particular — and "how an audience approaches a work, what they expect to find when they look at something. Do they expect to see the whole thing in an entirely gratifying manner, with the frame around it and they know where it begins and where it ends? Or, are they satisfied to find a piece of work which may not make much sense until they go back into the real world outside the gallery and start seeing things differently? Perhaps the only way to find out is to experience it for ourselves?"

James Coupe is currently an artist and Research Associate at the University of Washington's Centre for Digital Art and Experimental Media. News of upcoming exhibitions can be found on his website [www.ctrl.me.uk](http://www.ctrl.me.uk)

Rachel Hazelwood