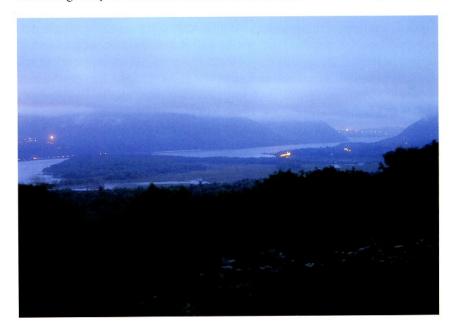
EXPANDING
CINEMA
THE MOVING
IMAGE IN
DIGITAL ART

## Streaming images

A crucial aspect of the history of photography, film and video is the notion of realism, the recording of 'real events'. While the staging and manipulation of photographs and film is as old as the history of these media itself, the representation of reality is still an important aspect of these media and an arguable historical convention. The idea of realism has gained a new dimension with webcams that can transmit imagery from anywhere in the world in 'real time' over the internet. Although television has been presenting live events for quite some time now, there is still a fair amount of control and filtering involved in this type of one-to-many broadcasting system. Events that are 'streamed' live in a many-to-many broadcasting system such as the internet challenge and relinquish this form of control, and pose fundamental questions about representation and authenticity.

Artist Wolfgang Staehle, for example, has created a whole body of work that consists of webcam images streamed live over the internet, among them Empire 24/7 1999 – a live image of the Empire State Building that references Andy Warhol's Empire (a seven-hour long video of the Empire State Building); Fernsehturm 2001, a view of the TV tower in Berlin's Alexanderplatz; and a series of landscapes, such as the Hudson River Valley, exhibited at Postmasters Gallery in New York in 2004. Projected onto the walls of a gallery, Staehle's works suggest a constantly evolving photographic image that becomes a continuous record of minute changes in light and every aspect of the environment. Exploring the boundaries between reality and representation, the pieces raise fundamental questions about the nature of the 'live' (yet mediated) image and its place in the context of art. Does the 'live' image render obsolete previous art forms, such as photography or video, which can only depict moments that are frozen in time? What role do the aesthetics of processing and mediation play in our perception of an artwork? By now, we are used to seeing live images of landmark buildings or sites on television or through webcams. Encountering this type of image on the wall of a gallery or museum, however, constitutes a radical change of context



Wolfgang Staehle Eastpoint 2004

Projected live video transmission, silent

that raises fundamental questions about representation and the nature of art itself. Staehle's live views are highly ephemeral, time-based documents that cannot and will not ever be repeated (except as an archived version).

While Staehle's work focuses on issues of representation, many other artists working with the streaming image have explored the aspect of access, surveillance, authenticity and 'telepistemology', the study of knowledge acquired over a distance. 'Liveness', which suggests immediacy and authenticity, has become an obsession of Western culture (at least judging from the continuous stream of Reality TV shows), and, particularly in the case of webcams, oscillates between voyeurism and exhibitionism. Yet the 'liveness' we experience through webcams or television is always filtered through layers of mediation, which ultimately exclude 'immediacy' and raise questions about authenticity.

Refresh 1998 by the architects and artists Diller + Scofidio explored precisely these issues. For the online project, Diller + Scofidio presented a grid of twelve images, apparently filmed by webcams in different offices, showing everyday activities, such as the after-hours cleaning crew or an office romance taking place by the water cooler. However, only one of the images in the grid was in fact live, while the others were specifically filmed for the project with actors. The work questions both the status of the 'real' and the role of mediation, since the presence of the camera and awareness of being watched is acknowledged through subtle changes in people's behaviour.

Our perception of media is to a certain extent defined by the level of insertion or immersion we experience. Theorist Edmond Couchot has claimed that the electronic screen does not function like a window and does not carry the inside towards the outside but inserts the outside into the inside, at the place of the spectator. However, digital media entail many different forms and levels of insertion that require consideration. It is debatable whether webcams that offer a view into someone else's space will be perceived as a window into another world or as an insertion of that world into the viewer's space. In fact, these technological forms seem to operate precisely on the border of the inside/outside. No matter how imprecise it may be, the windows metaphor, a basic element of the concept of the desktop, may itself have induced the perception of 'looking out'. Video works capturing live images of the viewer or immersive environments to varying degrees insert the viewer into the environment and simultaneously create a gap and continuity between their physical existence and the virtual representation.